MIDDLE EAST@WAR No.34

THE WAR IN NORTHERN OMAN

MUSCAT AND THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, 1954-1962

Peter Shergold

MIDDLE EAST@WAR SERIES

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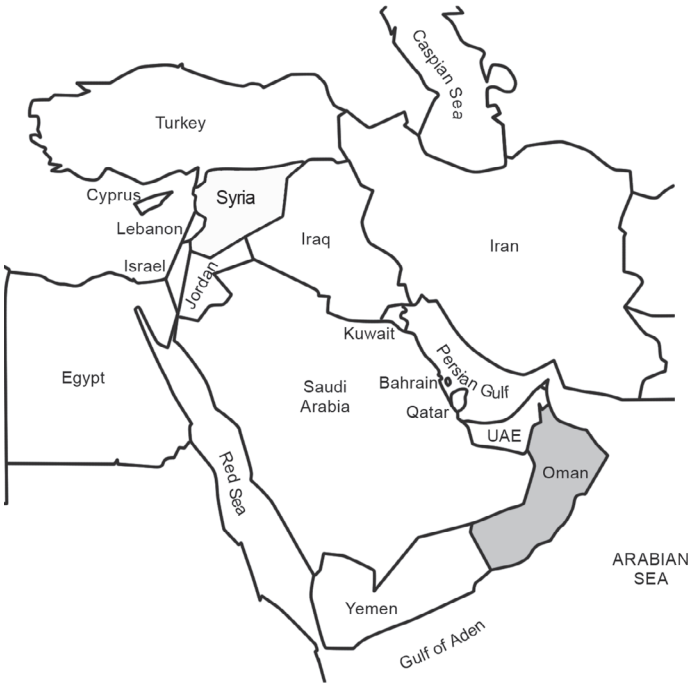

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas* or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of described events. Similarly, Arabic names are Romanised and transcripted rather than transliterated. For example the definite article al- before words starting with 'sun letters' is given as pronounced instead of simply as al- (which is the usual practise for non-Arabic speakers in most English-Language literature and media). Dates are given using the Georgian calendar, rather than the traditionally used Islamic calendar.

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Unit 8 Amherst Business Centre, Budbrooke Road, Warwick CV34 5WE, England
Tel. 01926 499 619
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Dedication

The book is dedicated to the people of Muscat and The Sultanate of Oman, who through the centuries have fought for their independence and strove for a bright future, which inshallah they have now achieved.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	anti-aircraft
AAA	anti-aircraft artillery
BF	Batina Force
Brig Gen	Brigadier General (military commissioned officer rank)
Capt	Captain (military commissioned officer rank)
C-in-C	Commander in Chief
CO	Commanding Officer
COIN	counter insurgency
Col	Colonel (military commissioned officer rank)
DF	Dhofar Force
SOAF	Sultan of Oman's Air Force
Flg Off	Flight Officer (military commissioned officer rank, equivalent to lieutenant or first lieutenant)
Flt Lt	Flight Lieutenant (military commissioned officer rank, equivalent to captain)
GBP	British Pounds Sterling
Gen	General (military commissioned officer rank)
GOC	General Officer Commanding
Gp Capt	Group Captain (military commissioned officer rank, equivalent to Colonel)
KIA	Killed in Action
Lt	Lieutenant (military commissioned officer rank)
Lt Col	Lieutenant Colonel (military commissioned officer rank)
2nd Lt	Second Lieutenant (lowest military commissioned officer rank)
Maj	Major (military commissioned officer rank)
Maj Gen	Major General (military commissioned officer rank)
MR	Muscat Regiment
MOAF	Muscat and Oman Armed Forces
MOFF	Muscat and Oman Field Force
NFR	Northern Frontier Regiment
OC	Officer Commanding
OG	Oman Gendarmerie
OR	Oman Regiment
Plt Off	Pilot Officer (military commissioned officer rank, equivalent to Second Lieutenant)
PoW	Prisoner of War
RAF	Royal Air Force (of the United Kingdom)
RAFO	Royal Air Force of Oman
SAF	Sultan's Armed Forces
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
SAS	Special Air Service
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
Sqn	Squadron
Sqn Ldr	Squadron Leader (military commissioned officer rank, equivalent to major)
UAC	United Arab Command
Wg Cdr	Wing Commander (military commissioned officer rank, equivalent to lieutenant colonel)

Members of the Muscat Regiment dug-in to defensive positions in the Sumail Gap. (Michael Clinch collection)

INTRODUCTION

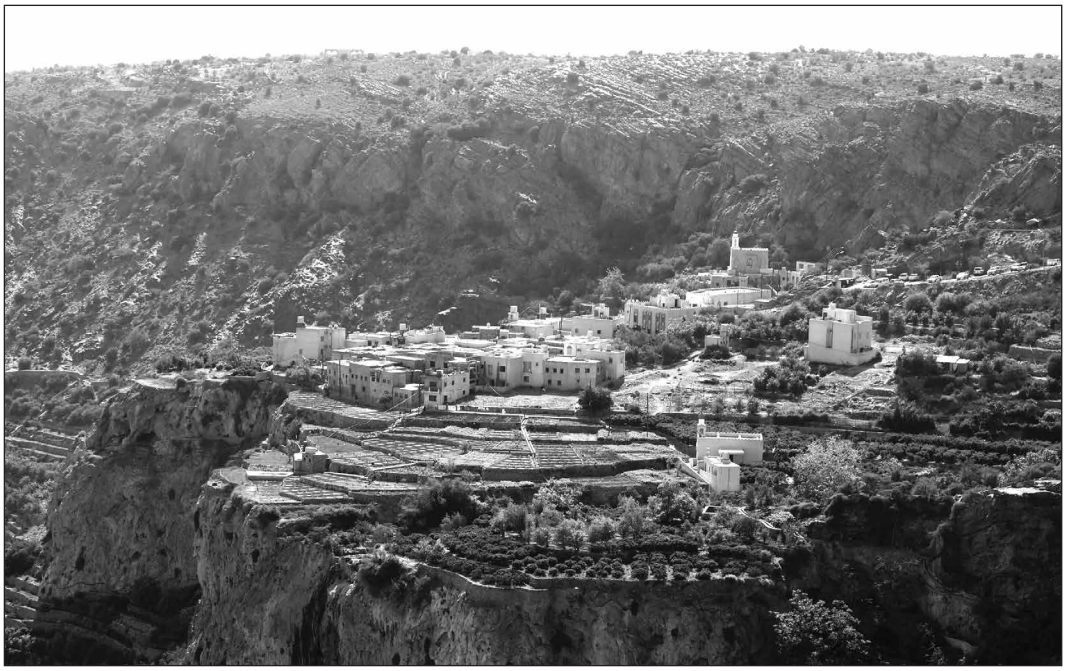
The war in Northern Oman covered a period from 1954 until the mid-1960s. In the study of counter insurgency it is considered less frequently than the subsequent Dhufar War. The conclusions in contemporary literature are often however similar, in that it was a war won by Special Forces, capacity building and the training of indigenous forces. As with the Dhufar War, study of the war in Northern Oman has focused almost exclusively on Special Forces military action unlocking the door to development.[1] This book will consider the hypothesis that victory and lasting peace were secured by a conventional military campaign of offensive operations, followed by the subsequent but entirely separate civilian development programme. In sum, that the insurgency was suppressed by punitive means with the limited capacity building during the conflict, and that the role of Special Forces was overemphasised with regards to their relative number of operations and their impact. Only once these offensive operations were completed did the development campaign start that contributed to the lasting peace. This peace, it will be argued, could not have taken place without the conventional fighting before it.

To consider the stated hypothesis, this book will outline the long-term and short-term causes of the war in Northern Oman. This will allow an analysis of the relative successes of different factors in producing the long-term peace and stability. These factors are divided into two areas, firstly, methods of force; consisting of the wider conventional military campaign, Special Forces operations and military capacity building. Secondly, the soft power factors of the civilian capacity building; reconciliation within Oman and finally international engagement. Each of these factors will be analysed for their relative impact on achieving peace and stability in Northern Oman, as well as being considered against the then future operations in the Dhufar conflict and within the context of wider counter insurgency doctrine. In conclusion, this book will make a judgement on why there was no further conflict in Northern Oman.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SOURCES

The Western literature on the war in Northern Oman is dominated by memoirs of those who participated in the SAS operation to seize the final stronghold of the rebels on Jebel Akhdar.[1] These memoirs, often written long after the events they describe, generally show a limited perspective of the wider conflict, focusing instead on the tactical actions of the Special Forces operation. They also overemphasise the significance of the Special Forces operations in proportion to the relative impact of these events on the outcome of the war. It is a truism to state 'anyone looking at the shelves of British bookshelves for works on the army since 1945 is likely to come away with the impression that it consisted of little else besides the SAS'.[2] However, some memoirs are of more use, such as those of senior diplomats[3] and leading commanders,[4] as they add analysis to their descriptions of events that are often supported by additional literature and evidence. There is a danger of unconscious bias with all of these accounts, especially in their Western-centric views of the campaign; there are few works from the perspective of the rebels. To counter this bias, the works by Arab academics are particularly useful[5] giving a different perspective on war. There are some significant historical works conducted about the period, many that contain detailed primary research of the war and its aftermath, these, when considered with journal articles on the conflict, are extremely useful for analysis. However, some works that dominate the period in literature have limited references,[6] claiming archives in Oman to which they have access. Care must be taken when considering the evidence from these sources, which are uncorroborated, especially when they draw conclusions that are considerably different to that of other literature with more detailed references.[7] To supplement this secondary research, additional primary documents are needed to give further evidence for consideration against the hypothesis.

The author, to support the analysis of the war in Northern Oman, has identified and analysed some primary sources. Many



A photo of the plateau at the top of Jebel Akhdar taken 60 years after the event outlined in this book. But still evidence remains of the devastating destruction on the landscape. (Author's collection)

papers are available in the Liddell Hart archive, collated by the Commanding Officer of 22 SAS, Lieutenant Colonel Dean-Drummond.[8] These include original secret documents, including operational orders; communication signals and post-operational reports, all of which give a historical basis on the Special Forces operations that took place. Although these documents may seem to give weight to the significance of Special Forces operations in the war, they also provide a context of these actions within the wider campaign both pre- and post-SAS involvement. Of particular significance is a 50-page handwritten patrol report that outlines the state of all the villages in the Jebel Akhdar region after offensive operations by British forces had finished.[9] Additional primary sources available in the Liddell Hart archive include press cuttings of the time that give historical context to the operations within UK public opinion.[10] Some diplomatic papers are available at the National Archive,[11] these are helpful to give context and information on the larger diplomatic and capacity building operations that occurred with Northern Oman. Of particular interest are the papers from the Foreign Office detailing development post the Jebel Akhdar campaign[12] and the papers of Colonel Hugh Boustead who was appointed as the Development Secretary to the Sultan post the Jebel Akhdar campaign from 1958 to 1961.[13] As these documents are withheld under the thirty-year rule, there is an element of honesty and analysis, especially when considering the impact of the development strategy within Oman.

The large variety of sources that can be utilised to examine the nature, causes and outcomes of the war in Northern Oman allow a wide-ranging analysis to take place. Consideration must be made of the relative bias of the sources, especially when drawing definitive conclusions. However, the use of primary research can bring fresh light to a campaign that suffers from some academic assumptions reinforced by popular literature. I have been fortunate enough to meet some of the veterans of the campaign and listened to their first-hand experience and also access many of their personal photos, for this I am hugely grateful.

Much of my research for this book in inspired by my time serving with the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces for two years on 'Loan Service'. The mountains of the Jebel Akhdar are now home to five-star hotels and infinity pools, but amongst the rocky outcrops evidence of the action that took place there is still clear to see, if you know where to look. The military customs post at the base of the mountain, showing a military dominance even 60 years later, and also the crashed RAF fighter-bomber, which lies rusting at the side of the road, with the pilot still entombed beneath the wreckage.

I would like to thank my late father-in-law, Frank Cremin, who even when terminally ill, took the time to read my initial notes for this project. My father David Shergold for adding his military history expertise to this project and finally my wife Laura, for putting up with me hiding away in the late hours reading old papers from a forgotten conflict.

1
THE GEO-STRATEGIC SITUATION OF MUSCAT AND OMAN

Muscat and the Sultanate of Oman bring a number of images to mind, from the rolling deserts of Wahiba Sands walked over by Wilfred Thesiger, to the expansive rocky moon surfaces of the Empty Quarter, across to the huge imposing mountains of the Jebel Akhdar range. Oman is a series of contradictions; an isolated community from a minor sect of Islam, which did not let outsiders enter until almost the modern day, to a vibrant trading community with an empire that stretched across the Indian Ocean and down the coast of Africa to Zanzibar. A society dominated by an autocratic leader but ruled historically by an elected Imam and collective consensus. A country that has been two countries for most of its history – Muscat and Oman – but also which has a collective identity which refuses to be subjected to long-term conquest.

Oman in the north is dominated by the port city of Muscat, where traditionally its leader, the Sultan, resided. Along the northern coast, numerous small towns and villages led by local Sheiks, pay homage to the Sultan and were often related to him through marriage and family ties. The hugely imposing Jebel Akhdar range of mountains dominates the north coast, separating it from the interior. Internally 'Oman' has a number of small towns, such as Nizwa, Ibri and Ibra, which again were led by Sheiks, but voted for their own leader in the form of the Imam. The Imam ruled by consensus, and therefore although he was a figurehead, he would rarely act unilaterally. The Imam himself was the nominal head of the Ibadi religion, so acted as the religious leader to his people.

The interior is mainly dominated by a huge area of barren rock, which gently merges into the great sand dunes of Arabia. This Empty Quarter is exactly that, an area of open nothingness, where only the Bedouin tribes walked and there were no physical borders. This lack of borders led to conflict between neighbouring states for the dominance of villages and towns. This particularly took place in the area of Buraimi, where the border between Oman, Saudi Arabia and the Trucial States was ill defined. Such conflicts only grew with the discovery of oil in the region, and borders from this point became very important.

At the southern tip of the Empty Quarter lies the port town of Salalah, home to the Sultan's palace. The people of Salalah were

An abandoned Bedford truck lies in the Empty Quarter, a place of rocks and sandstorms. (Author's collection)

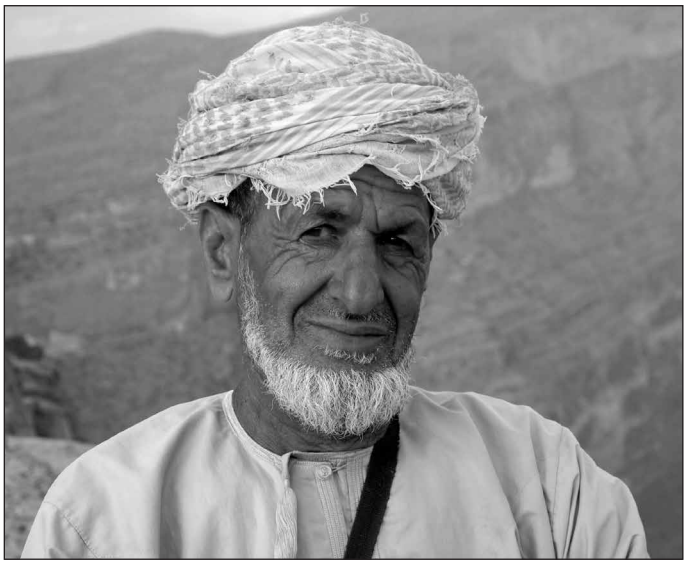
A typical view of the deserts of Oman. (Author's collection)

A sentry stands under the Sultan's red flag on the roof of Merani Fort in 1963. (Christopher Hinton collection)

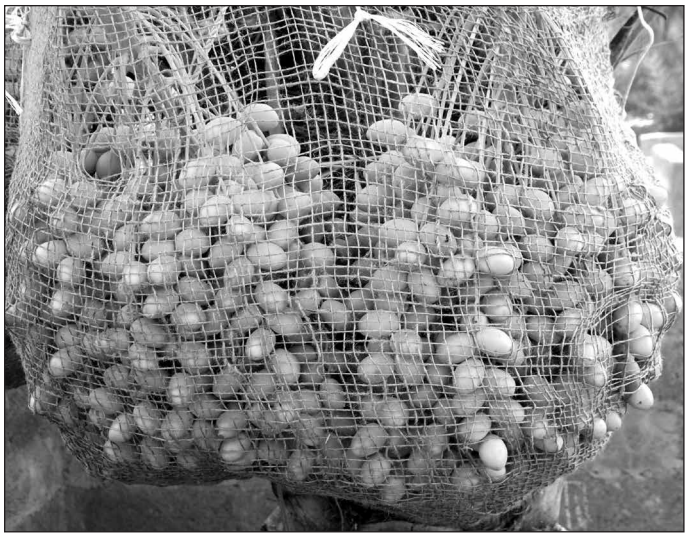
not of the same birth of traditional Omanis and therefore treated as second-class subjects for most of the country's history. Salalah itself is a natural area of beauty that once a year, when hit by the western edge of the monsoon, forms a green paradise, as beautiful as the Garden of Eden. The natural harbour of the town has allowed trade to flourish in the region for many years, being part of historical trade routes and the home to precious frankincense. Salalah was also a point of entry for many Muslims making the annual pilgrimage to Mecca from across the Indian Ocean, and so very much a trading hub.

Conflict in Oman has followed a cycle of intervention over the last five hundred years. The country has been repeatedly conquered by a series of foreign forces, from Persians to Portuguese, each time the foreign powers have been brought into the country by the rich coastal city state of Muscat, this has led to conflict with the internal tribes of Oman. The internal tribes have thereafter defeated the foreign powers (and Muscat), thereby creating a new dynasty that over time gains wealth and then brings in foreign influence, leading to future conflict. This long-term cycle was interrupted through intervention by Britain in the later 19th century and the early 20th century, causing an imbalance of power that has manifested itself in a united Omani state. This cycle of change in Oman is known as 'the cycle of command, or Wilkinson's cycle'.[1] As the persecution of the Dhufar population in Southern Oman would provide the backdrop for the Dhufar War of the 1970s, the majority Ibadi population in northern and central Oman would provide the backdrop of the war in Northern Oman of the 1950s. This Ibadi population often came into conflict with the multicultural and multi-ethnic population of the Batinah coast and Muscat.[2] In addition the hatred of the Sultan and the influence of foreigners in his court, linked him to the historical cycles of rebellion and led to the same causes of rebellion which had been seen in the past.

It was during the mid-8th century that Oman started to develop independently to the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, when the majority of its people embraced Ibadism as a religion and detached themselves from the rest of the Muslim *Khalifah*.[3] It is this separate identity that has produced some principles in which its people have developed a distinct identity. These principles include the elected succession of the Imam in contrast to the Sunni view that an Imam should descend from Mohammed,[4] a non-conformist agenda that suited the tribal society and unified its people against external aggressors and the avoidance of paying *zakat* (tax) that helped traders operating on the coast expand their influence[5] and led to an increased presence from the East India Company and later Britain. An estimated 60 percent of the population of Oman is Ibadi, the majority coming from northern central Oman; they follow their spiritual and temporal leader, the Imam.[6] The Imam was selected by three principles, his knowledge, moral qualities and capacity for governing. The Imam was chosen by the sheikhs who were in turn elected by the local elders, and this democratic process gave a basis for support to the Imam, who's ideology was to protect the culture and religion of the



A traditional Omani of the Ibadi sect. (Author's collection)



The annual date crop was still the biggest export in Oman in the 1950s despite an ever-expanding oil trade in the region. (Author's collection)

interior from outsiders. The tribal character of the interior reinforced the doctrine that saw the Imam, through the Quran, as the font of authority. The influence of the Imam was such that during the 1920 Treaty of Seeb, spheres of interest were given to both the Imam in the interior and the Sultan on the coast, creating a de facto state within the interior. People in the interior were not only protected by a religious ideology that came into existence to promote social justice, but also by a tribal system that looked after its own.[7] This separation of the Ibadi people by ideology from the coastal areas led to considerable divisions with the multicultural coastal areas often manifesting themselves in conflict when external aggressors were perceived to interfere with the spiritual and temporal doctrine of the interior.

In Omani society, a national identity was created that served to unify the people of this isolated land to unify against external dangers.[8] However, Ibadi tradition allows for mutual acceptance of the believers of the 72 other variations of *firqa*, in that other Muslims would not be converted or attacked. The key word here is mutual,[9] other sects should

Portuguese forts dominate the coastal region of Muscat and remain a reminder of the foreign interventions of the last five centuries. (Author's collection)

A typical Omani Village in the 1960s, impoverished and reliant on pastoral agriculture. (Tony Calder collection)

not try and convert those of Ibadi denomination, and this certainly did not mean the Oman was a peaceful state. This culture in Oman has led to one of isolation, especially in the interior of Oman, but also one of acceptance of traders and other elements along the coastal regions. Therefore, a conflict of interest between the approval of these traders and the maintenance of cultural independence developed, this was reinforced by the fact that within Ibadism the community of Muslims was and is the primary unit of identification, not any ethnic, kin or religious grouping.[10] Although disagreements were common amongst the tribes of Oman and these led to incessant tribal warfare,[11] the acceptance of the wider Muslim community often left the violence to those periods when the external influences of the coast would interfere with their way of life, such as with the invasions by Portuguese, Persians and British. The conflict between those who focused on the Ibadi doctrine of trade against those who focus on their spiritual independence led to two distinct cultures dividing Muscat and Oman; this division was a key long-term cause of conflict in Northern Oman.

The Ibadi sect of Islam is one of acceptance, but is also closely related to the Shia, hence the difficulties with Oman's dominant neighbour Saudi Arabia. (Author's collection)

Towers dominate the routes in and out of villages in Oman, a culture of tribal clashes. (Author's collection)

Before the 17th century, there was a dark age in evidence within Omani history. Details are 'largely unknown, owing to the paucity of documentary evidence'.[12] Post this period, a cycle of conflict is noticeable by the interventions and civil war. Wilkinson's cycle describes a movement of population and spheres of influence, from the interior to the coast. It consists of the building up of empires, wealth and allies on the coast; intervention by foreign powers with this new-found wealth; unification of the interior and defeat of the foreign power; the establishment of a new dynasty and empire on the coast. The cycle has repeated itself three times since the dark ages of Omani history, with the Portuguese, the Persians and then finally the British. The initial cause of the involvement of foreign elements on the coast of Oman can be linked to the Ibadi acceptance of trade. Omani shipping and merchants played a significant role in linking the ports of Iran and Iraq to the eastern wing of the Indian Ocean trade network.[13] These trade links led to Omanis in foreign ports being given rights to sell and export their goods, mainly dates, but also for foreign persons to settle in Oman and establish trading rights for imports. Such trading rights did not include the interior, where foreigners were forbidden. In the case of the Portuguese and the Persians these foreign traders expanded into occupations in the coastal areas. They had the little interest in the interior areas, due to its lack of economic significance and harsh terrain, this led in tern to a further maintenance of the interior's independence.

This domination of the coast by a non-Muslim power resulted in a unification of the interior against the invaders, 'a *modus vivendi* (mode of living) exists until the forces of the interior can reassemble in reaction to domination by outside Muslim powers or Christian, Portuguese and then British'.[14] The conflict to

The empire of Oman stretched from Zanzibar in the south to Baluchistan in the east, this was formed on a system of high seas trade based on the Omani dhow. (Map by Tom Cooper)

remove the external power from the coast, such as that by the Ya'aruba against the Portuguese in the 18th century, led to a new dynasty on the coast which would become wealthy through trade and commerce, effectively again separating from the traditional tribes of the interior. The relationship of the Sultan of Muscat on the coast and the Imam inland has been finally balanced through history by the cyclical conflicts and interventions by overseas powers.

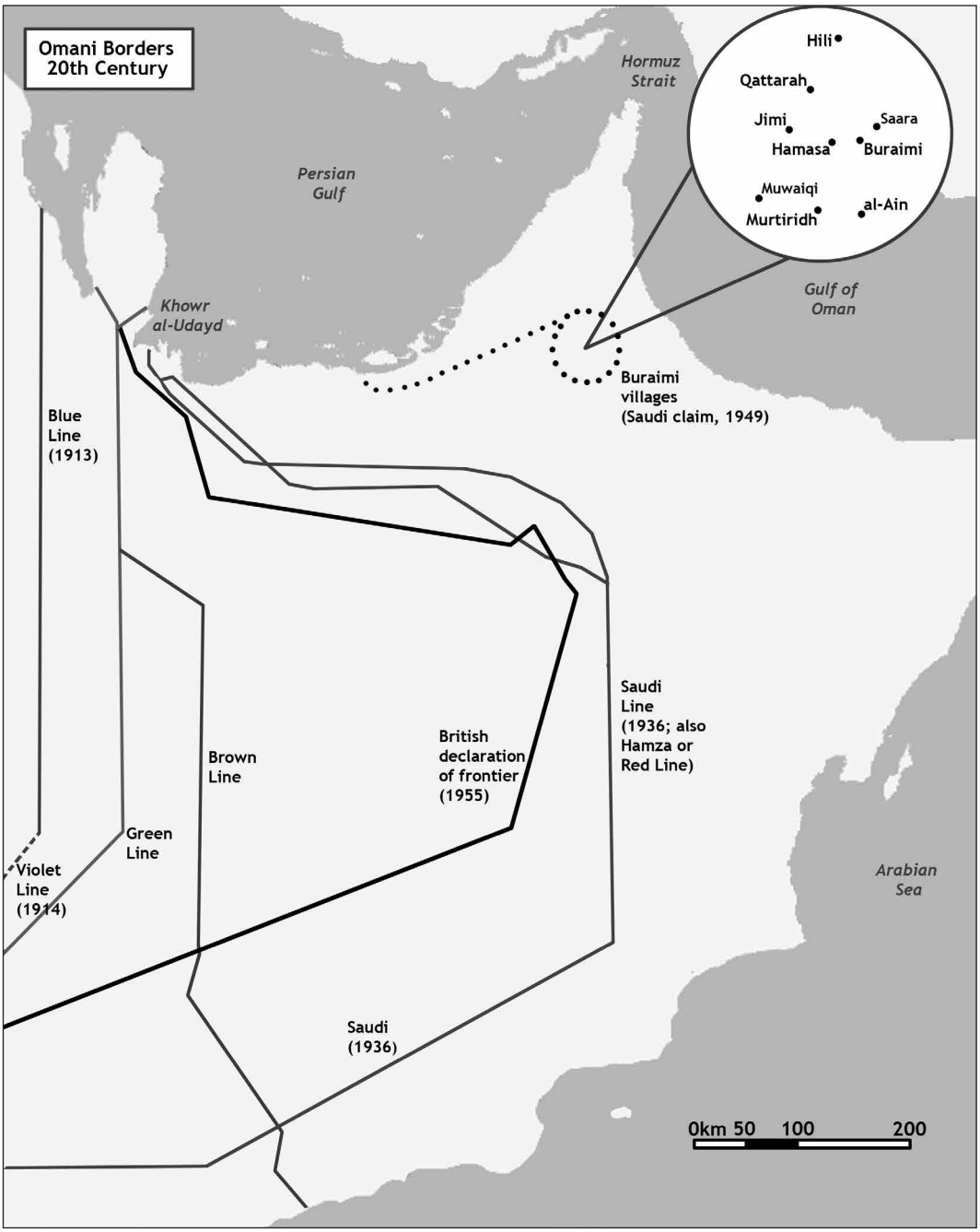
What changed this cycle of conflict was the overwhelming force of the British Empire. In 1624 the port of Muscat, which at that point was under Portuguese control, came to feature in the commercial policies of the English East India Company.[15] Up to 1856, British interest in Oman was limited, with the main reasons for engagement being the access to markets for Indian and British goods. However, there was an increase in involvement as *Qawasim* seafarers (pirates), based out of Saudi Ports started to disrupt British trade. This led to some campaigns against them culminating in the 1819-1820 expedition when the British imposed the General Treaty of Maritime Peace.[16] British influence steadily increased throughout the 19th century, leading to a unification of the interior against the Sultan under this British influence.

British involvement in Oman caused the Sultan to be weakened further through their policies towards trade, and these policies exacerbated the already broken relationship with the interior. Arab historians blame the decline of the Omani empire of the 18th and 19th centuries on the British, mainly because of the split between Zanzibar and Oman during the Canning Arbitration and Helgoland-Zanzibar Exchange. Zanzibar was a colony of Muscat and paid an annual payment of 40,000 Maria Theresa dollars to the Sultan. However, in 1880 the Sultan of Zanzibar, under increasing German influence in Eastern Africa, defaulted on this payment. The Sultan of Muscat asked the British for assistance and this led to the Canning Arbitration which effectively divided Oman's empire in Zanzibar from the Sultan in Mucat. A payment from Britain was now given to the Sultan rather than him having any direct control over Zanzibar. Zanzibar itself was recognised internationally as being under British influence, in return for British recognition of the island of Helgoland to Germany.

This action led to a deepening involvement of Britain in Oman in the latter part of the 19th century with the Sultan's position increasingly undermined. This debt from Zanzibar was taken on by the Government of India and led to a presence of British Indian administrators, and later troops, in Muscat. The Zanzibar subsidy was the first step towards the Muscat Sultanate's financial dependency on the British.[17] As Sultans over time became more dependant of British subsidies, they became weaker in their command of Muscat and Oman. They no longer believed in their own authority and in general moved to their more attractive palace in Salalah to live out their days. In practical terms, the British could not afford to allow the Sultanate to disappear, since the Sultan had proved so malleable to their interests,[18] therefore there was increased assistance in administrative matters. Over time this led to a situation of growing British influence in the state. In parallel to this the Iman in the interior was very much left alone and gained influence and power. There was also an increase in hatred towards the Sultan and his British masters from those who followed the Iman in the interior throughout the first half of the 20th century.

Violence came to a head during the revolt of 1913, when the interior rebelled. However the British felt that their interests were to hold Muscat and therefore reinforced Muscat with regiments from India, this allowed the Sultan to remain in power.[19] The British argued this was support for a rightful monarch,[20] Arabist academics argue in turn that this makes no connection between the opposition to the Sultan of Muscat and the latter's support for Britain.[21] The division between interior and the coast was exacerbated, because the Imam was never defeated, as although the Government of India were prepared to defend the capital, they had no intention of intervening in the interior, leaving the Iman in control there.[22] These actions by the British ended in the Treaty of Seeb which led to the de facto creation of an independent state in the interior, the Imamate, and the Sultan's rule restricted to the coast. British involvement in the rebellion had profound and fundamental consequences for Oman with British imperialism interrupting the historical pattern of Omani politics.[23]

The period running up to the war in Northern Oman was defined by the war that took place between the Imam and the Sultan in 1913. Up to this point the Sultan, although only

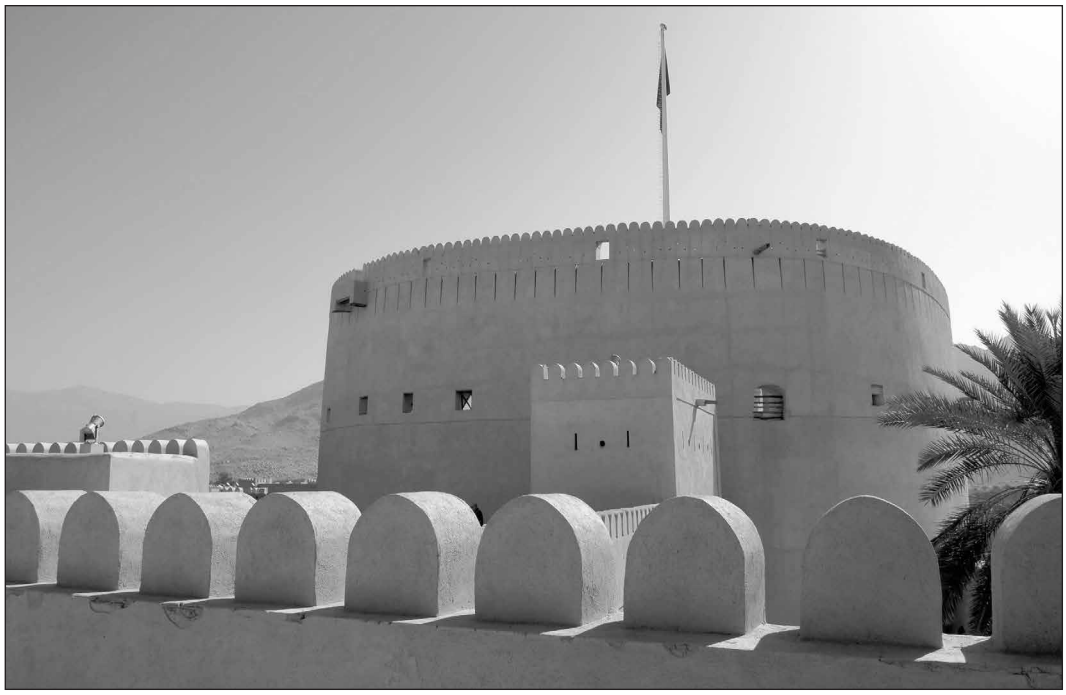


The emergence of the modern-day borders of Oman was primarily dictated by continuous conflicts with the neighbouring Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The main map shows the various border lines, while the inset shows the villages in the oil-rich Buraimi area. (Map by Tom Cooper)

nominally, was the ruler of the interior. However, the Treaty of Seeb created a formal divide between the Imam and the Sultan, which led to the conflict later in the century. It was the support provided by the British 'Indian' Army which allowed the Sultan to maintain his power and power base in Muscat, without this it is likely that he would have been defeated back during the 1913 revolt. The Sultan had very poor relations with his neighbours also, with disputes over the ownership of villages and the line of the border with the Trucial States (mainly Abu Dhabi) and Saudi Arabia. These relations were soured by repeated incursions by all sides in the area, and local Sheiks being influenced by bribes from all parties.

After the Great War, these divisions within Oman were not settled and in fact British influence only increased over time. It is important to understand the Ibadi identity of the Omani people in order to appreciate the impact the interference within their temporal and spiritual spheres had on the population. The previous response to interference from outsiders was rapid and often violent, as shown throughout the centuries and this was very much a cultural tradition. The Iman was still in power and had not been suppressed so it was only a matter of time before violence would start again. The level of British interest grew over time and also, the level of suppression of the Sultanate increased with restrictions on trade, education and movement. In 1939 an agreement for trade in the Sultanate was conducted by a British minister acting on behalf of the Sultan, to a British minister representing His Majesties Government,[24] this was almost farcical and showed the total dominance over the Sultan by this time.

In addition to this dominance, the Sultan himself did not help as 'the excesses of Sa'id's reign obviously contained the stuff from which revolutions are made'.[25] To say that the economy of Oman at the turn of the 20th century was behind its neighbours would be a huge understatement. Industry and commerce were at an incredibly basic level, with the main exports being dates from the wadis and fish from the coast. There was little or no real industry and other than subsistence farming, the population was reliant on camel farming and date farming, grain imports from India yearly. The government itself was tiny, with only a few administrators working for the Sultan, and a handful of retainers working for the Imam. There was embryonic oil exploration taking place, but access to the hinterland was so restricted that the sites had not been fully exploited by the start of the 1950s. Many books have been written about this beautiful country, which still lived in medieval times. Outsiders had not been welcome, and very few had seen the beauty of its interior. Some see the Jebel Akhdar War and the subsequent Dhufar campaign as proxy conflicts of the Cold War and this was certainly the contemporary perspective, but in reality, they drew on deeper grievances caused by poor governance, deprivation and economic disparity. To this unfortunate mixture, one might also add feudal values, tribal rivalries and a long-standing distrust between Muscat and Oman.[26]



Nizwa Fort, the scene of the initial fighting by the Imam and the Sultan's forces, leading to the defeat of the Oman Regiment. (Author's collection)

Eagle: hawking is a popular pastime for the tribal leaders in Oman. (Tony Calder collection)

After the Second World War great power games were on the increase in Oman, especially since the discovery of oil in the region. The US had numerous oil concessions in Saudi Arabia, and the British in the Trucial States, Iraq and Oman. The border disputes between Oman and Saudi Arabia led to effectively a proxy war between the erstwhile allies of the UK and USA, through the oil companies who wished to have access to the lucrative oil fields in Buraimi. This all added to the mixing-pot of cultural, political and international diplomacy of a country which, inherently unstable and geographically vulnerable, could be exploited and be ready to fall into conflict at the slightest spark.

The military forces of the Sultanate were very small in 1950, with four minor units only; the Batinah Force, the Muscat and Oman Field Force, the Muscat Infantry and the Dhofar Force. In total this was a strength of less than a thousand men, commanded by Contract Officers, each of the forces directly reporting to the Sultan.[27] In 1955 this changed as the Commanding Officer of the largest of the forces, the Muscat and Oman Field Force, was made commander of the Muscat and Oman Armed Forces, with a small headquarters in Bait al Falaj. The forces were again changed in 1957 into regiments, with both an increase in mentors from the British Army and an increase in Contract Officer numbers and a structure to reflect the British Army regimental system. In 1958 the Muscat and Oman Armed Forces became the Sultan's Armed Forces, showing the unity of the country after the occupation of the interior. Funding throughout this period for the military was very small, however the increase in numbers of mentors and Contract Officers allowed an increase in quality of the small army over time.

Despite the frustrations of the people of Oman at this time, it was also a place of mystery and discovery for those posted there as part of the embryonic Loan Service scheme in which the British Army exchanged officers to command Omani units. This scheme supplemented a Contract Officer scheme where soldiers and officers, mainly from the subcontinent, would service on a more transactional basis. Those who served on Loan Service were generally those officers, who in a period of empire decline, were looking for adventure and travel.

Such an adventurous posting was almost unheard of at the time, and as the conflict in Oman increased and the requirement for military personnel with it, such officers would get trapped by the beauty and adventure which was the soon to be Sultanate of Oman:

> There was virtually no investment at the time as the oil money was not yet flowing. The country was very much as it had been 300 years before, which is why I found it so fascinating. There was no discernible investment in the military or locally. For example, I went to the local prison at Nizwa, which was a round fort. One prisoner had been there for decades and had no idea why he was being imprisoned as the Qadi who had done so had

TABLE 1: THE EVOLUTION OF THE SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES

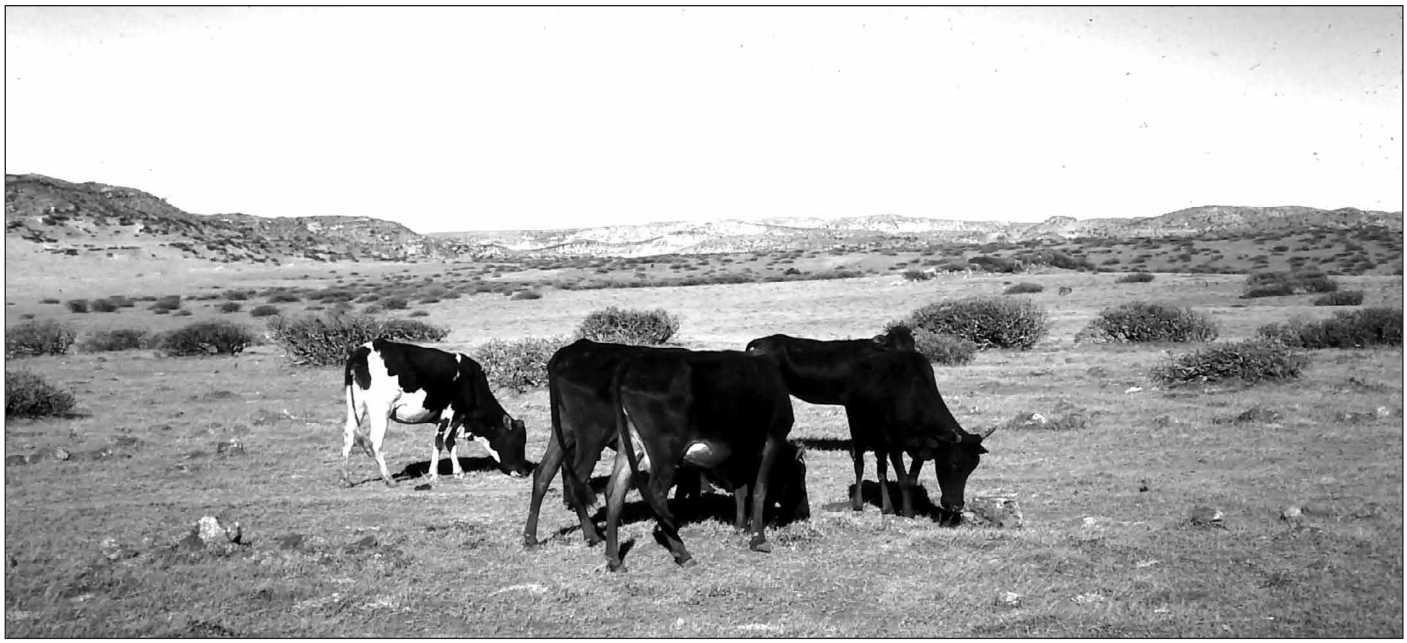
YEAR	REGIMENT						
1950	Muscat Garrison / Coastal Patrol	Muscat and Oman Field Force	Batinah Force	Muscat Infantry	Dhofar Force		
1955	HQ Muscat and Oman Armed Forces *(Inclusive of Muscat Garrison and Coastal Patrol)*						
1957		Oman Regiment *Disbanded (Aug 57)*	Northern Frontier Regiment	Muscat Regiment			
1958	Sultan's Armed Forces						
1959						Oman Gendarmerie	Sultan of Oman's Air Force

died and so could not release him. He depended on his family for food.[28]

The causes of the conflict in Northern Oman have their routes through five centuries of foreign intervention and trade; divisions of cultural and religious significance underline these. The friction increased with the discovery of oil and the undermining of the Sultan as he became part of the informal British Empire. Short-term policies by the British government led to a focus on the security of the peripheries of Oman, rather than dealing with these long-term causes, again exacerbated the chances of rebellion. The international embarrassment caused by the siding of Britain with the Sultan is documented at the highest levels of British policymaking with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs commenting that the 1957 intervention caused 'considerable international embarrassment'.[29] Intervention in Oman by the British caused a political stalemate; the Sultan wanted submission of his enemies; however, Britain wanted a political settlement as its interests lay in its higher strategic aims.[30] Contemporary views of the later Dhufar War have suggested that 'hearts and minds and civilian development were more symbolic than memoirs and some secondary source accounts suggest'.[31] It is possible that this hypothesis can also be applied to some extent to the war in Northern Oman a decade before.

As previously discussed, Oman was considerably underdeveloped, even when compared to neighbouring countries in the Middle East, and this had continued into the 1950s. There were many restrictions placed upon the local populations for example, Omanis were not allowed to venture beyond Muscat's walls after sunset and pedestrians were required to carry specified non-electric lamps about them at night.[32] The underdevelopment of Oman, especially in the interior, was becoming noticeable by the

Oman Gendarmerie Patrol in 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)



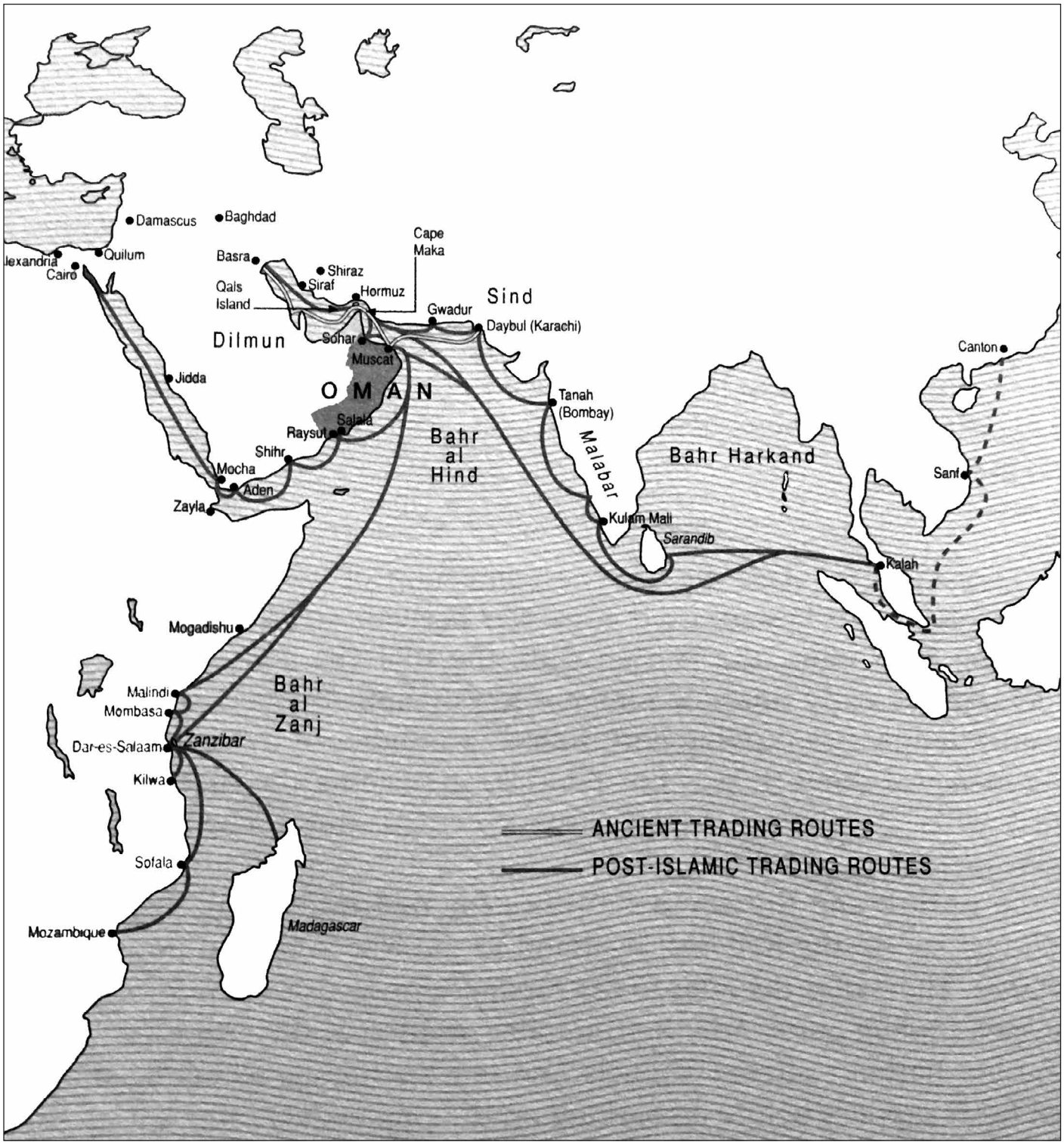
Cattle on grasslands in the hinterland of Oman, 1964. (Tony Calder collection)

The Wali's office in Muttrah, 1963. (Christopher Hinton collection)

population as an increasing number of Omanis began to find work in the wider Middle East and bring their comparisons of relative prosperity back to Oman. This built up a level of discontentment. It is argued that Sultan Sa'id believed that by isolating Oman from the outside world he might be able to perpetuate his form of rule.[33] He was not keen on development projects such as schools or hospitals, and his reasoning was a lack of income from Oman's weak economy.[34]

In reality there was a significant amount of corruption within the regime. In 1958 the Sultan received a windfall of three million pounds for the sale of the Omani enclave of Gwadur, this money was deposited in a Swiss bank account.[35] Also Sultan Sa'id still received the Canning Award payments of 40,000 Maria Theresa dollars, which continued until 1956; these probably went into his privy purse.[36] Sultan Sa'id was not a ruler for the times. He was unimaginative, rigid, cautious and miserly. He had an inability to administer Oman in a remotely modern manner.[37] The economic underdevelopment, causing discontentment throughout the country, was a significant cause of the rebellion which would follow. British intelligence reports used by the SAS before their 1959 operations state that: 'In general, the rule of the Sultan was unpopular and he was secretly despised by most of the people'.[38] The population of the interior were united by their disdain for this leader, who did little to support their everyday lives, despite him receiving what was perceived as considerable financial assistance from the outside world and trade.

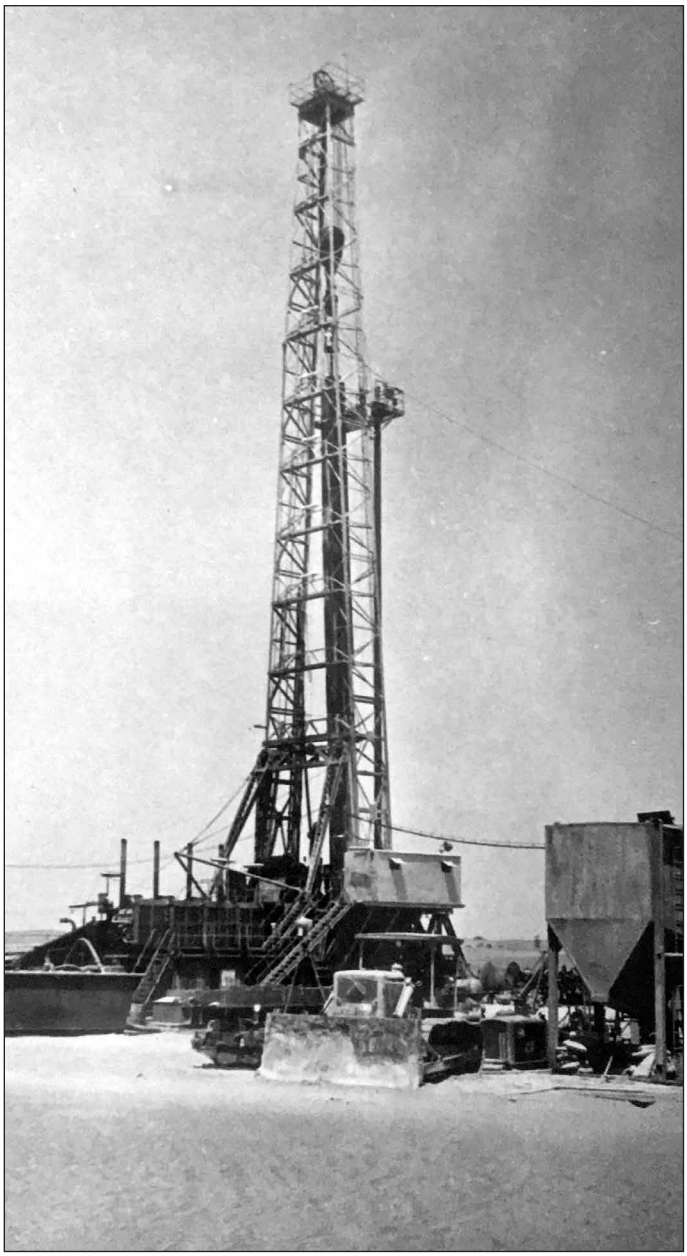
The divide between the interior and the coast was further exacerbated by the interference of regional and international players. The British were key to supporting the Sultan. However, influence on the Imam by neighbouring countries was not insignificant. The biggest threat to the Sultan was assessed by the British as 'widespread guerrilla activity, supported by arms and money infiltrated from Saudi Arabia, or from the United Arab Republic and Iraq, both of whom have pledged their support for an independent Omani State'.[39] The support for the Imam by Saudi Arabia was arguably due to the dispute over the Buraimi oil fields, which were located on the unmarked border between Saudi Arabia and Oman and were a potential source of revenue. Captured letters pointed to the Saudis as the original troublemakers, providing 500 Omanis with small-arms training at Mamma.[40] The interference of the United States, which had a considerable investment in Saudi Oil exploration, but had been excluded by treaty from exploration within Oman, cannot also be ignored. SAS Top Secret orders state that the rebels 'receive supplies of USA weapons, mines and gold from Saudi Arabia'.[41] The influence of oil within the region, an increasingly critical commodity, had led to international



British Trade and Oil Routes in 1950. (Author's collection)

involvement in the domestic dispute between Imam and Sultan. This was an important short-term factor in causing the conflict.

Although Oman was not formally part of the British Empire, there was an element of an informal empire where considerable British influence was had over Sultan Sa'id and his policy decisions. Relations with Oman were described during the later Dhufar War by Julian Amery a British forces commander; 'We give him help [the Sultan], we sometimes give him advice. But we do not give him orders'.[42] British interests within Oman were very much practical, considering all options for wider policy aims. These policy aims are explicitly stated by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1960 to be; 'related principally to the preservation of the independence of Kuwait, on account both of her oil and of her sterling balances, and for this purpose certain political and military requirements in the Persian Gulf must be assured: in particular, the confidence of the rulers in our protection must be maintained, and we must retain military facilities in Masirah (which belongs to the Sultanate).'[43] To that end, the policy considerations of the British were not just to keep the Sultan in power, but retain him as a means to securing oil routes from Kuwait. Therefore, the interests of stability for Oman were less important that short-term security. To back up this understanding of British strategy, the policy identified by the British to support the Sultan was considered, amongst other options, including that of supporting the rebels in achieving their aims. However, there are 'no grounds to believe that the rebel



An exploratory well operated by Petroleum Development Oman in the interior of Oman. (Christopher Hinton collection)

leaders, collectively or separately, would agree to anything less that complete autonomy'.[44] These statements and the detail given within the Foreign Office briefing note show that, fundamentally, the British were utilising the Omani state to secure both their oil supply from Kuwait and the strategically crucial airfields from Masirah. With the wider conflicts in Aden and other areas of the collapsing British Empire, much opposition was building against British interference within the region, it was widely stated that what drove all of these rebellions in Egypt, Oman and Aden, was a sense that the foreign pressure in their country was a humiliation that had to be ended.[45]

From a regional perspective, relations outside of Oman were already strained with many of its neighbours within the context of anti-imperialism and pan-Arabism. General Nasser came to power after the 1952 revolution in Egypt, and many impoverished areas within the region now started to support the idea of being free from a dictator. Although the movement of these pan-Arabic revolutionary ideals would not hit Oman's southern neighbour Yemen until a decade later, they certainly caused the locals to consider their loyalty to the old regime, especially after the United Arab Republic was formed in 1958. The 14 July revolution in Iraq in 1958 only added to these concerns and the number of potential adversaries for what was considered by many to be a colonial-backed Sultan in Oman. The neighbouring Shah in Iran was a stronger friend of the Sultan, however the lack of diplomacy conducted by the Sultan because of the formal British backing prevented deeper ties being made. Finally, the relations with both Saudi Arabia and the Trucial States were strained due to disagreements over the location of the inland border, especially around the potential oil reserves in Buraimi.

The spark that directly led to the revolt starting in Northern Oman was the succession crisis of May 1954, when the Imam Muhammad al-Khalili died and Ghalib bin Ali al-Hina'I was appointed as the new Imam.[46] The events that led to this action are clouded in mystery, with a lack of documentation or evidence. What is clear is that a British oil expedition supported by the Muscat and Oman Field Force, an Omani regiment, moved to Ibri in the interior and within the Imam's domain as per the Treaty of Seeb. During this movement, it was decided by the Sultan that the 'Greater part of the interior is loyal'[47] and a permanent occupation was organised. Shortly after his succession in 1932, the Sultan had been preparing for reunification, courting tribal sheikhs and emphasising his piety and championing resistance to foreign intrusion.[48] In 1955 the Sultan toured the interior, and a large expansion of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) took place with a loan from the British government. The final actions of the succession crisis occurred in late 1955 when the SAF seized the Buraimi Oasis from the Saudis and then occupied Nizwa, leading to Ghalib and Talib fleeing to Saudi Arabia. What is of significance again are the interests of oil and the British

Traditional fishermen on the Batinah coastline north of Muscat. (Christopher Hinton collection)

in supporting an occupation of the interior, this led to the start of rebellion throughout the next decade.

2
THE RISING

The military campaign of the war in Northern Oman went through a series of phases; the first was the initial occupation of the interior by the Sultan's forces in 1955; followed by a subsequent rebellion in 1957 where British conventional forces intervened, and finally the siege of Jebel Akhdar from 1958 to 1959. Throughout the entire period of the conflict there were low-level uses of mines and other methods of attack by rebels, but the period of open conflict was restricted to these three phases.

It is a commonly held preconception that throughout the campaign the Sultan's control of central Oman was maintained only by the presence and action of the Sultan's Armed Forces[1] with little or no development taking place in support of the military effort. However, there is evidence that some development was attempted to various degrees, and was successful in some areas. The underlying causes of the rebellion having been explained in the previous chapter, the Sultan did try and focus on trying to alleviate the concerns of his people. It was this attempt at understanding his people and gaining additional income which led to the first movements into the interior of Oman. Both through the exploration for oil, and the potential income it could bring, but also through the overland excursion to meet his people by the Sultan from Salalah in late 1955, which formally consolidated Muscat and Oman as one country, under one ruler.

Iman Ghalib Alhinai was elected Iman on the death his predecessor Iman Alkhalili, who died on 3 May 1954. Ghalib was from Rustaq and was the son of the previous Wali of Rustaq. On being appointed Iman, his younger brother Talib was made governor of Rustaq in his place. Ghalib would lead the resistance to the Sultan's moves into the interior, but it was his brother Talib who was the military leader, and worked with Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt. In 1954, under British pressure, the Sultan licensed a subsidiary of the Iraqi Oil Company to prospect for oil at Fahud in central Oman. Fahud was within the area which was deemed to be under the control of the Iman, according to the Treaty of Seeb, and was seen by Iman Ghalib as an act of aggression. This was escalated further when the Muscat and Oman Field Force was used to occupy the area in support of the Oil Company. In one of those ironies of history, the first oil well which was finally sunk in 1957 did not come up with any oil, it was only years later in 1967 that a second well, only a few hundred yards from the first, came up with commercial quantities of oil.

The first military action that took place in the war in Northern Oman was the occupation by the Muscat and Oman Field Force in October 1954, when the unit moved with the Oil Company to seize Fahud and then Ibri. The force consisted of only seven officers and 371 other ranks, who had only received limited training.[2] The force was sponsored by the International Oil Company, who wished to be able to speculate for oil in the hinterland. This in itself was a controversial act, as since the 1913 revolt, the Imam had de facto authority in Oman, this exploration was without his agreement. Once the force landed at Duqum, the Sultan visited the expedition and thereby gave the mission further legitimacy, but also further infuriated the Iman. In reality, the initial movements of logistics had taken place in February and March 1954, prior to the Imam's death, showing that this was very much a pre-planned operation. Once the Imam died, the Sultan gave agreement for the force to move inland to Jebel Fahud, south of Ibri, to start exploration.

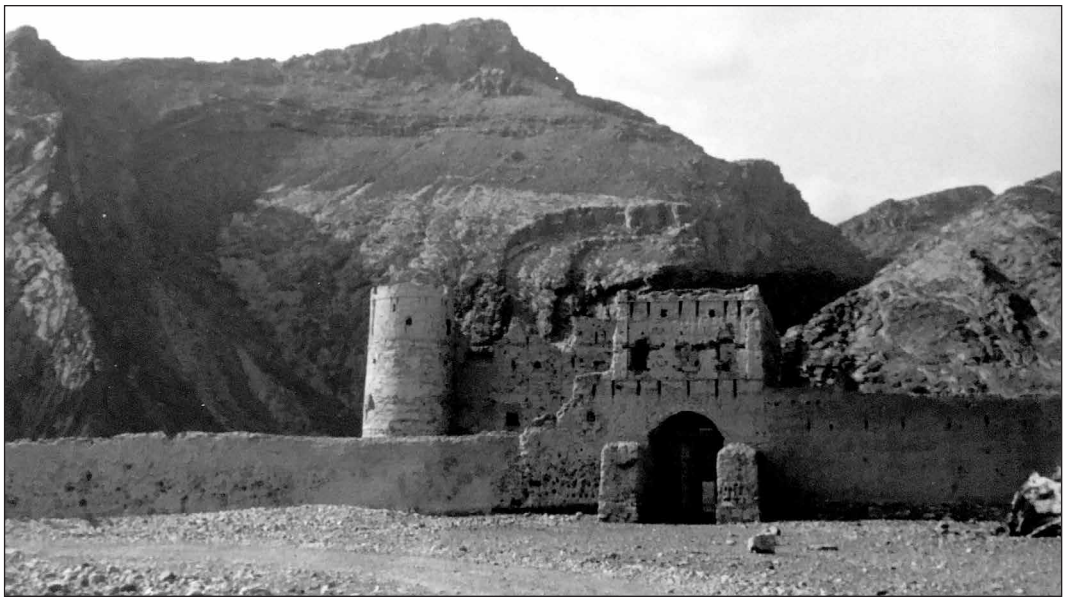
Some suggest that the Sultan did not give permission for an entry into Ibri itself,[3] however whatever the truth behind this, the Muscat and Oman Field Force moved to the outskirts of Ibri by 27 October 1954 and this led to the Imam's forces withdrawing east to their capital at Nizwa. The occupation of the interior in such a rapid way was clearly in the interest of the Sultan, who thereby consolidated his position, and geographically isolated the Imam's forces from their allies in Saudi Arabia. It was the first step in what would be a rapid consolidation and legitimisation of the new state of Muscat and Oman. What is more, it was a deliberate occupation of the areas surrounding Fahud, not just the oil fields themselves. Ibri is over 100 kilometres north of Fahud but, along with Nizwa, provides the only access road from the north.

In preparation for the next phase of the Sultan's operation, development of the armed forces accelerated in 1955 with the forming of the Dhofar Force in January and the formation of the Headquarters of the Muscat Armed Forces in April, giving a formal structure to what was previously a series of independent regiments. This, combined with the forming of a signal detachment in Bait al Falaj and a training detachment in Ghallah, increased the quality of training and the command and control of the Army. A loan from the British government underpinned this growth and

Balad Sait, the home of Ghalib and Talib, in 1963. The man in the centre is Shaikh Zaham bin Zahr al Himai, cousin to Ghalib. (Christopher Hinton collection)

showed the close relations between the governments continued. A new artillery unit was formed in Muscat for this ever-increasing force.

The second phase of the Sultan's occupation of the interior and the main incursion by the Sultan's forces, occurred in October 1955 with the support of the Trucial Oman Scouts, under British command, with elements of the Muscat and Oman Field Force moving to capture the Buraimi Oasis. The use of the military during this action was very much conventional in nature, utilising maximum force to overwhelm the disparate elements of the Imam's troops, as well as the Saudi garrison at Al-Buraimi. The Trucial Oman Scouts that captured the village of Al-Hamasah on the outskirts of Al-Buraimi were not Omani, but a colonial regiment of the British Army, scaled with British equipment and commanded by British officers and senior NCOs[4]. The use of this British regiment from the Trucial States was an example of how intertwined the British were in the support for the Sultan's operations at this point. The Trucial Oman Scouts were a modern well-equipped force in comparison to the Muscat and Oman Field Force. The Muscat and Oman Field Force, later called the Oman Regiment, as part of the embryonic Muscat Armed Forces was a much more informal organisation. This amateur nature was shown when four hundred men were collected on the Batinah coast by the Sultan's officers; they were issued with a shirt, a pair of trousers and a rifle, given basic drill and called soldiers.[5] To that end their achievements were in fact remarkable, in that they completed the subjugation of the interior of Oman in less than two years.[6]

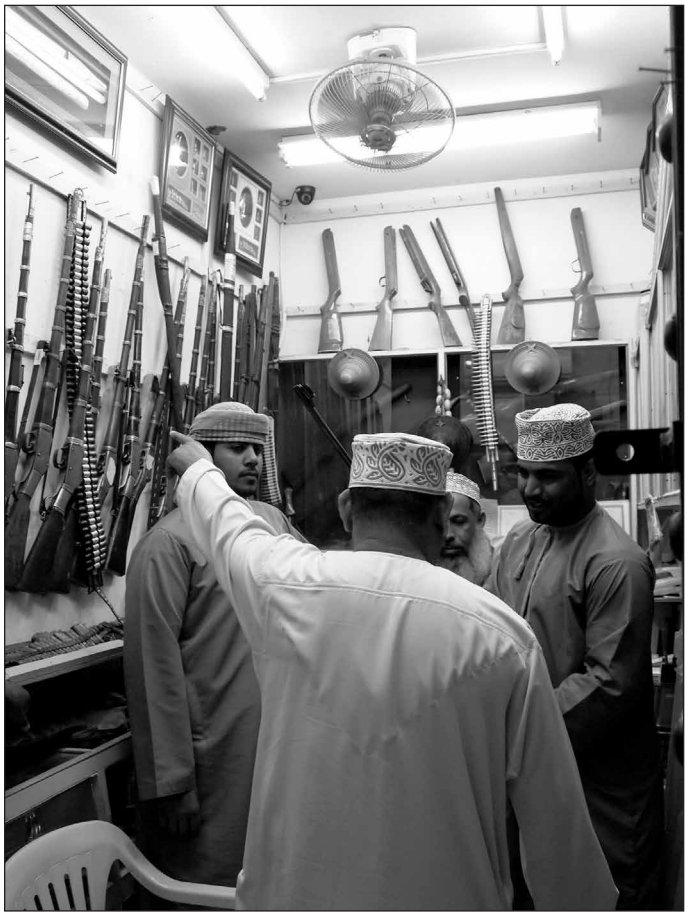


The fort of the rebel Suliman bin Himyan al Reyami, destroyed by air attack. (Christopher Hinton collection)

The final military operation in this campaign of occupation was the occupation of Nizwa by the Muscat and Oman Field Force in December 1955. This operation had the aim of capturing Ghalib and his capital. Again, maximum force was to be used, using a motorised column of two rifle companies, supported by mortars and artillery. The rapid movement over a seven-day period led to the unopposed occupation of the town, with the majority of the Imam's forces having already fled. The operation was very much successful in defeating the Imam and in unifying the country.

What followed was an expert political action by the Sultan to consolidate his gains. He drove cross country from his palace in Salalah through the villages of the interior and into Nizwa. This grand tour consolidated his gains and led to an increase in his popular support initially. This tour is described fantastically in Jan Morris's book *Sultan in Oman* and is highly recommended for those who wish to understand more of the period.[7] It also gives an interesting insight into the political negotiations with other tribes which were taking place;

> If Nizwa might be said to be the Mecca of our journey, and Ibri perhaps its Reno or Monte Carlo, Buraimi can best be likened to its Yalta; for it was there the Sultan was to meet the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi to set the stamp of ceremonial upon their amicable divisions of influence.[8]



The people of the Jebel were traditionally hostile to the dominance of Muscat and the Sultan, supporting the Imam based in Nizwa. In reality, many were armed with weapons that were over a hundred years old, fighting all the advantages of modern technology. (Author's collection)

The actions in 1955 to occupy the interior were very much conventional in their scope. The actions removed the power of the Iman by occupying the key settlements of Ibri and Nizwa but did not decrease the support of the local population for the Imam, or the unpopularity of the Sultan himself in these areas. Despite the visit of the Sultan to the interior and the pledges of fidelity

which followed, the reality was that hundreds of years of loyalty to the elected Iman were not going to change overnight. Further to this, the escape of Talib and Ghalib during the occupation, as well as much of their arms and equipment, led to further conventional fighting, an insurgency based around Jebel Akhdar, and the development of Oman Liberation Army in Al Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

After the initial defeat of Talib's forces, elements of the Sultan's forces started routine patrols within the interior, and various garrisons were set up to secure key locations. The Muscat and Oman Field Force in Buraimi was replaced by the Muscat Infantry, and in 1956 they moved to the interior to concentrate on securing the key oil locations from any attacks. There were a number of minor attacks on the Oil Company and Sultan's forces in 1956, but most were very small in scale and often dealt with by local actions. One incident near al-Mintirib, where two soldiers were killed, was resolved by the Shaykh paying 1,200 Maria Teresa dollars for each of the soldiers.[9] Such incidents were rare during this period, and a relative calm set about the interior. However, Talib, who had now escaped into Saudi Arabia, was just reorganising and preparing for another incursion as soon as he was able. The Saudis were only too happy to train hundreds of Oman Liberation Army fighters in Al Dammam, especially considering their loss of Al-Buraimi, which they wanted to claim, with its oil, as their own.

During early 1957, developments were occurring in the Sultan of Oman's forces, with three units being re-designated as regiments, and reorganised to have a more formal structure, and greater support from British Loan Service and Contract Officers. The Muscat and Oman Field Force was re-designated the Oman Regiment, the Batinah Force to the Northern Frontier Regiment and the Muscat Infantry to the Muscat Regiment. More trained recruits were arriving from the central training depot, and a slow trickle of improved equipment from increased funding by the British. However, the majority of soldiers were still poorly armed and equipped, and although accommodation was better than the extreme poverty of the villages most soldiers came from, it was still extremely basic, and in most cases in tents or ancient forts. This development was designed to mirror the structure of the British sponsored units in neighbouring Trucial Oman (now the United Arab Emirates) where the Trucial Oman Scouts (Regiment) were and in the Aden Protectorate where there were seven battalions of Aden Protectorate Levies and the Hadhramaut Bedouin Legion.

Based out of Saudi Arabia, Talib formed a fighting force of 300 fighters, made up mainly of expatriate Omanis from Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, along with some who fled Oman with Talib in 1955. Named the Oman Liberation Army, this small force was given support by both the Saudi government and through US arms. It was seen internationally to be fighting for the legitimate Iman, and against colonialism, so received much support at this point. The force knew how to cross the open border and had much support from the local population, so was able to infiltrate across the border and attack when the time was right.

The politics of the Oman Liberation Army are of much debate, they are often linked to the Dhofar Liberation Front of later years, which had both Arab Nationalist and Marxist links. This is particularly so, as once the fighters were defeated in the north, many moved and joined forces with the Dhofar Liberation Front in the south. However, in reality most of the fighters in Talib's forces were supporting the Iman, and were either from the interior or expatriates who were isolated from the Sultan's regime by leaving to work in the wider Arab world. In Saudi Arabia, Talib's fighters were trained by US mercenaries, and their trainers and those who authorised the training in Saudi Arabia and the USA, were very much focused on the potential oil concessions in Oman, which the British dominated under the Sultan.

In command of the Oman Liberation Army on behalf of Iman Ghalib were two very different characters. Suleiman bin Himyar al Nabhani was the Sheikh of the largest tribe in the interior the Bani Riyan and was the power behind Ghalib being made Iman. Suleiman was more motivated by oil contracts than by support to the Iman or Arab Nationalism, having raised the issues of oil contracts with the British in 1949 and the Saudis in the 1950s. Alongside Talib's main core of Oman Liberation Army were up to three thousand of Suleiman's tribesmen who, like all Omanis, had carried a rifle as soon as they were old enough.

Talib in comparison was much more politically motivated, firstly because it was his brother who was Iman, and therefore he believed in the system which had got him there. But, as time went by, he was also influenced by the pan-Arab nationalism which was spreading at this time, and this influenced his approach to his elements of the Oman Liberation Army. He built contacts with Arab Nationalists in Iraq and Egypt and managed to get support from some fighters who had previous training in specialist skills from there. These were likely trained by intelligence agencies in these countries. The smaller force of Talib would become more dominant in the strategy of the Oman Liberation Army, with an aim of overthrowing the Sultan and pushing the British out of Muscat and Oman.

Despite the competing objectives of Suleiman and Talib, the training that the overall force received allowed a strike to take place by 1957. The main counterattack by the Oman Liberation Army occurred in the early summer of 1957 and was a two-pronged assault. At Sur, Oman Liberation Army fighters landed by boat and moved inland, while concurrently Talib and Ghalib moved forces with light machine guns and mines to Wadi al-ula in central Oman to raise the banner of revolt again. The objective was to gain popular support from the tribes of the interior for the Iman, and gain loyalty by overwhelming the small Sultanate forces which were a force of occupation.

Around 300 Oman Liberation Army fighters were present in central Oman at this point, facing the garrison made up by the new Oman Regiment. Lt Col Bill Cheeseman, Commanding Officer of the Oman Regiment, was ordered by the Sultan to deal with the insurgency and use local levies to assist in this. However, the local levies would not assist until they had seen that the Sultan's forces were able to defeat the insurgents, showing that their loyalty was both still to the Iman, but also was reserved for whoever could show the most effective fighting power. The Oman Regiment were forced to attack alone.

What occurred next was the defeat of the Oman Regiment, an incident of such significance that it prompted the direct intervention of British troops in the conflict. Talib and his supporters occupied and raised the flag of the Imam over Nizwa in June 1957, and there was little or no resistance to this initial move. The Sultan chose to use conventional military solutions again to solve this rebellion by sending the Oman Regiment to deal with the revolt. However, this time the rebels defeated the Oman Regiment by ambushing them close to Nizwa. The scale of this defeat should not be understated in its importance and also for the overwhelming odds against which the Oman Liberation Army achieved this. The Oman Regiment was at full strength and

had been reinforced with A Company of the Muscat Regiment, A Company Northern Frontier Regiment and two 3-inch pack howitzers from Muscat. This substantial force advanced on Nizwa but was repeatedly ambushed as it advanced through the various tribal roadblocks. Although it suffered fewer than a dozen casualties, the Oman Regiment effectively collapsed, with half the soldiers deserting, and most of the battalion's equipment and vehicles lost in the retreat. The battalion retreated on foot towards the coast, with their stores left at their headquarters at Raddah camp, which was also looted. It was a total disaster and had the potential to turn the whole interior in support of the Iman.

As news of the defeat spread around the garrisons of the interior further surrenders took place, including the surrender of the Oman Regiment garrison in Nizwa Fort itself. This in turn led to the tribal leaders declaring their support to Talib, and the black flag of the Iman being raised on forts across the interior. The remnants of the Sultan's forces pulled north, some in order, most not. As the remnants of the Oman Regiment moved north, it was organised by the Muscat Armed Forces Headquarters that they should be flown to Sohar on the coast to avoid them mixing with other units. Lieutenant Colonel Cheeseman was summoned by the Sultan and dismissed. The Oman Regiment was subsequently disbanded and never re-formed.

This defeat had considerable repercussions for the morale of the remainder of the Muscat Armed Forces, and for a period of two months the fate of the interior was in question. The Sultan and his British advisors acted decisively, requesting immediate military support from Britain. From a political view, Britain could not afford to lose their ally in such a strategic position, especially with bomber bases on Masira Island and other key military instillations in place. The option of allowing the Iman victory was no longer possible, as the Iman was now absolutely anti-British and would be likely to not allow British interests to remain. The British however, did not give support freely, with the announcement in 1958 of a bilateral agreement, Britain agreed to provide support to Muscat and Oman, but in return for bases in the long-term.

The response from Britain in support of the Sultan was substantial and rapid. The 1st Cameronian Highlanders, a regular infantry battalion, was flown into Oman on Beverly transport aircraft at the start of August. The battle group was supported by Ferret Scout Cars of the 15th/19th Hussars and three squadrons of the Trucial Oman Scouts. Four RAF Venom jets from Adan were allocated in support of the operation.[10] The first units arrived on 3 August 1956 and started to build up around the Headquarters of the Muscat Armed Forces at Bait al Falaj.

Such a build-up of British forces in and around Muscat had a huge psychological impact on the tribes of Muscat and some from Oman and the interior. The Sultan asked for support from local tribesmen to form another militia force to move into the interior, much in the same way that the Muscat and Oman Field Force was formed in 1954. By 6 August, the Sultan had gained the support of around a thousand local fighters ready to march south into the interior and were lightly equipped from the old stocks of equipment from the Muscat Garrison, some of these weapons were from the 19th century.

The attack plan was a simple one, the forces were formed into a brigade commanded by Brigadier J Robertson and were formed into two 'Columns'. The first 'Carter Force', named after the Commanding Officer of the Trucial Oman Scouts, consisted of three squadrons of Trucial Oman Scouts, D Company of the Cameronians and elements of the support weapons company from the Cameronians. The second Column was 'Haugh Force' under the command of the Lieutenant Colonel Frank Haugh, a Loan Service Officer with the Muscat Armed Forces. The column would move south to Nizwa and defeat the Imam's forces in detail. Importantly the British ground troops were supported by considerable RAF ground attack support. These ground attack aircraft had a huge physical and psychological effect, on one day alone the Venom jets flew 12 sorties firing over 7,000 rounds of 20mm cannon.[11] A small air control party moved forward with the advancing troops allowing direct air support and for supplies to be moved forward for the troops.

The attack south was hugely successful, with Nizwa falling to the columns on 11 August. The RAF Venom fighters shot up the retreating tribesmen as they fled the town and over 40 prisoners from the Oman Regiment were released once the fort was occupied. There were efforts to put tribesmen in the vanguard of the attack, but in reality, it was the Ferrets of the Hussars which found enemy strongpoints, the RAF which neutralised them, and for the difficult fighting the Cameronians were used to dislodge the enemy. The fighting was intense and conventional in nature; many of the officers and senior NCOs had experience of conventional fighting from the Second World War; they knew how to attack a town and they did it with ruthless effectiveness. The hammering of buildings with mortars, heavy machine guns, air and armoured support was immense, and allowed the determined highlanders to breach and seize houses rapidly. The lightly equipped fighters of Talib's force were used to small engagements and sniping, not fierce urban combat and they broke and ran under the assault.

Once the city and outlying areas were recaptured then the Sultan's civilian officials moved quickly into the area to bring the villages and towns under control. Those forts which had opposed the Sultan were ordered destroyed with explosives, including those in Tanuf, Nizwa al-Ulayah, Birkat and Izki. Political prisoners were returned to Muscat and the minister of the interior arrived in Nizwa on 15 August. In a short campaign from the arrival of the first British units on 3 August, the victory was complete by 17 August, when the majority of the Cameronians were airlifted out of the country. The advance of the Cameronians into Nizwa led to the rebels fleeing the country. The occupation was ruthless and almost feudal in its suppression of the population.

In just two weeks the conventional defence of the interior was crushed. However, with the defeat of the Oman Regiment, hundreds of fighters from the various villages had joined Talib's force. In addition, with the ruthless destruction of family homes, and taking of hostages, many chose defiance rather than surrender. The Ibadi distrust of those foreigners who would try and interfere put the Sultan on the wrong side of their conscience. Over a thousand of the fighters which had swelled the ranks of Talib after his defeat of the Oman Regiment were to escape, blending into the background and amongst the people who had supported them and the Imam. They moved rapidly to new positions, taking as much equipment as was possible to carry.

Again, the conventional actions in this conflict failed to achieve long-term victory. The rebels under Talib still maintained support from the population, even to a greater extent after the actions of the assault by British forces. Talib moved to the high ground, establishing a base of operations on Jebel Akhdar, the highest mountain on the Arabian Peninsula, and dominating terrain for any movement from Muscat to the interior. Talib also started a campaign of both influence, handing out money to local villagers and buying their support, as well as intimidation and terror,

The Muscat Regiment move from Bait al Falaj to BidBid. (Michael Clinch collection)

mining roads and shooting at any of the Sultan's forces that were seen.

The lack of support for the Sultan was evident by the influence that Talib had still amongst the local villages at the base of the Jebel. Talib's agents distributed money to local villages; the Sultan's forces relied on suppression. As Talib's forces went on the offensive and occupied villages beyond the Jebel, the Sultan's forces and the British used extreme force to suppress them again and again. On 20 October 1957, a force of 50 Oman Liberation Army fighters had occupied the villages of Tanuf and Kasamah. The order from Headquarters of the now Sultan's Armed Forces was for 'a Punitive Column to sack the village and destroy date palms and Falaj (water channel)'.[12] This column consisted of Omani soldiers from the Northern Frontier Regiment and four armoured cars of 15th/19th Hussars. After the occupation, the Sultan ordered the total destruction of the two villages. Some influential historians have until now portrayed the British Army in a bright moral light when compared to other Western armies. This is a rather selective view of the past.[13] The destruction of the village shows that the actions of the Sultan in this campaign were conventional and had a negative impact on long-term stability in the interior, focusing on the killing of the enemy and suppressing of the population rather than any reconciliation or development.

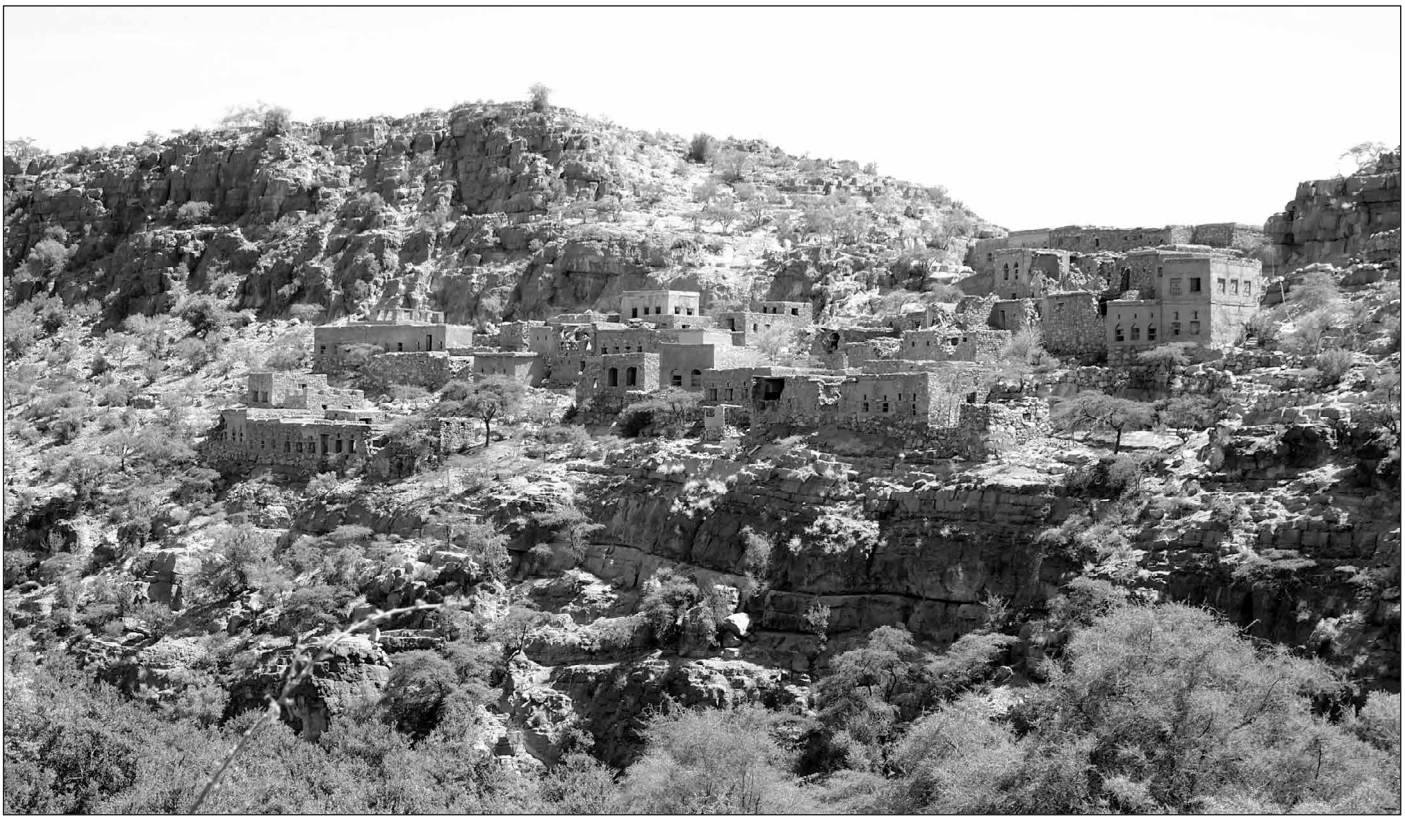
As 1957 turned to 1958 Talib's campaign continued, with the mine attacks and shootings stopping any development or improvements to the interior. Despite occupying only a small area of Oman, the rebels had proven to be a nuisance and the stoppage of trade had caused the price of rice to treble.[14] Extensive numbers of mines were laid on the main roads of the interior in addition to the sniping and ambushes. 150 vehicles were destroyed in six months before January 1959, including 18 strikes on the Ferrets of the Life Guards.[15] Foreign fighters were present amongst the rebel forces; SAS intelligence identified 10 such fighters in November 1958, utilised for specialist equipment such as mortars and a wireless set for contact with Saudi Arabia.[16] What is more, they were undermining the Sultan's authority and could lead to an escalation of the rebellion in support of the Iman if nothing was done. The decision was made to conduct the 'February 58 Plan', a plan devised to lay siege to the mountain stronghold.

The February 58 Plan saw the mountain surrounded by with two regiments of the SAF, supported by an additional 21 British Loan Service personnel.[17] This conventional blockade was meant to isolate the rebels while they were persistently attacked from the air. This air campaign was ruthless and immense in scale, using the full might of the Royal Air Force. By September 1958 the RAF had flown 1,907 sorties, dropped 1,540 tonnes of bombs, fired 3,718 rockets and 278,060 rounds of 20mm ammunition.[18] More bombs were dropped on Jebel Akhdar than on Coventry at the height of the Blitz. Villages at the base of the mountain were searched and arms seized, roadblocks were put in place and those who resisted were arrested. Water supplies, via the ancient falaj network, were deliberately targeted and destroyed despite these systems being of huge historical importance. This was siege warfare in its truest sense, and indiscriminate in its targeting of the population.

The de Havilland DH 112 Venom was an extremely effective aircraft both as a fighter-bomber, but also due to its design as a night-fighter was able to attack positions with great effect throughout the day and night. The rockets and cannons were used to devastating effect on buildings, destroying most and their supporting falaj water systems. Later on in the campaign, RAF Canberra medium bombers were used, giving an even heavier payload for attacking the positions on the mountain side. Each Canberra could carry up to 8,000Ibs of bombs, or a mixture of rockets and cannons. The rebel fighters on the Jebel had little effective defence against such firepower but were able to use the terrain to great effect to avoid the bombing, utilising caves and tight wadis as natural defences. Despite the huge weight of firepower thrown against them, the bombing had little impact on their fighting strength, with few actually killed by the attacks.

TABLE 2 – BRITISH UNITS PRESENT IN THE WAR IN NORTHERN OMAN

UNIT NAME	ESTIMATED SIZE	DATES DEPLOYED
1st Cameronians	Battalion	3-17 August 1957
15th/19th Hussars	Ferret Armoured Car Squadron	3-17 August 1957
13th/18th Hussars	Ferret Armoured Car Squadron	August 1957-1958
Life Guards	Ferret Armoured Car Squadron	1958-1959
SAS	Regiment – three squadrons	October 1958-February 1959
Royal Marines	Training Teams	21 Royal Marines in 1959 with NFR



The ruins of the villages in Jebel Akhdar are evidence of a highly controversial bombing campaign which left huge amounts of destruction behind. (Author's collection)

The falaj water network, relied on by the people of Jebel Akhdar, was largely destroyed by the RAF bombing campaign. (Author's collection)

Despite this intense campaign over nine long months, the attrition failed to deal with the causes of the conflict and by the end of the year there were still large numbers of tribesmen throughout the Sultanate who were potentially likely to join the rebels unless some major setback was inflicted.[19] The fighters on the mountain were not defeated and were in dominating positions which would take a considerable conventional force to assault. Despite Talib not being able to influence the villages below the Jebel as much, they still managed some offensive acts, and had widescale support in these villages, and sympathy with the aggression of the outsiders. The longer the campaign went on, the more likely international opinion would also move to the side of the Iman, under siege from the imperial aggressors.

The attempted suppression of the Imam's rebellion was ineffective by conventional means, despite three separate military operations. An official from the British consulate in Muscat noted that; 'we have attacked this small and inoffensive community with most of the weapons of modern war and have caused damage which is hard to appreciate unless you see it at close quarters.'[20] It was clear that the Imam at the end of 1958 still had considerable support in the interior and the attempts to remove it had come to nothing. There is a historical master narrative that often compares the German use of mass violence and suppression against that of British use of minimum force.[21] This narrative links into British doctrine of the time often based around that of documents such as 'Imperial Policing' by Major General Gwynn in 1934, which advocates the minimum use of force against irregular armies. However, in Oman, the minimum force approach was not used. In fact, there was extensive evidence of targeting civilian infrastructure and destruction of property to separate the rebels from their support base. This destruction was not unusual for British forces, in Mesopotamia collective punishment was an integral part of quelling the insurgency of 1920. British ground troops or the RAF routinely razed dozens if not hundreds of rebelling villages to the ground.[22] Future conflicts would continue in this guise even into the 1970s, with the campaign in the Southern Oman province of Dhufar where free fire zones were again used, where any movement of personnel and camel trains was assumed to be enemy and was subject to air attack.[23] The motivation for such action was that it was both cheaper than the

THE SHOOTING-DOWN OF THE VENOM FIGHTER-BOMBER

More than 50 years after the uprising in Oman, the grave of a young RAF pilot who crashed on the mountain, and the debris of his aircraft remain as reminders of the conflict. On 30 August 1958, Flight Lieutenant Owen Watkinson of the Royal Air Force crashed his de Havilland Venom FB.Mk 4 onto the Saiq Plateau of Jebel Akhdar. No 8 Squadron, RAF, survives to this day, based in Great Britain at RAF Waddington, near Lincoln, and flies Boeing E-3D Sentry Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft, which have seen service over the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. The squadron's crest, approved by King George VI in 1943, is a sheathed Arabian dagger, which signifies its 'long association with the Middle East'.

Locals say that the young pilot failed to pull out of a dive after strafing a herd of goats, targeted by the British as a vital resource for the rebels; others say that he was shot down with a rifle by a man whose son still tells the tale. Inspection of the wreckage after the conflict showed bullet holes in parts of the aircraft. Flight Lieutenant Watkinson's wife, Jill, was living in RAF married quarters in Aden when her young husband died. She returned to the UK and eventually re-married, moving with her American husband to New York, where she lives today.

Wreckage of the crashed Venom fighter-bomber, serial WR552 of Flight Lt Owen Watkinson, whose remains lie beneath, remain as a reminder of the conflict in the forgotten corner of the Arabian Peninsula. (Christopher Hinton collection)

TABLE 3 – CASUALTIES DURING THE WAR IN NORTHERN OMAN

TYPE	BRITISH AND OMANI FORCES	INSURGENTS	CIVILIANS	REMARKS
Killed	23*	228	120**	Figures are included from a variety of sources
Wounded	110	57		
Vehicles Destroyed	198			

* During the period 1956 to 1959 a total of 60 British soldiers were killed in the Arabian Peninsula[25]
** Includes tribesmen abducted

use of ground troops and presented a simple solution to what was, in reality, a complex problem.

Despite the military action over the year of 1958 under the February 58 Plan, the ineffectiveness of the blockade was clearly identified by November in this statement in an intelligence report; 'two batches of reinforcements, probably trained in Saudi Arabia, have reached the Jebel.'[24] Not only were the direct attacks with overwhelming force failing, the attempted isolation using two battalions was ineffective. The Royal Air Force was also not invincible, with a Venom bomber shot down by small-arms fire. What was meant to be a short, swift campaign to defeat the Iman for good, was rapidly turning into a disaster. Something had to be done.

3

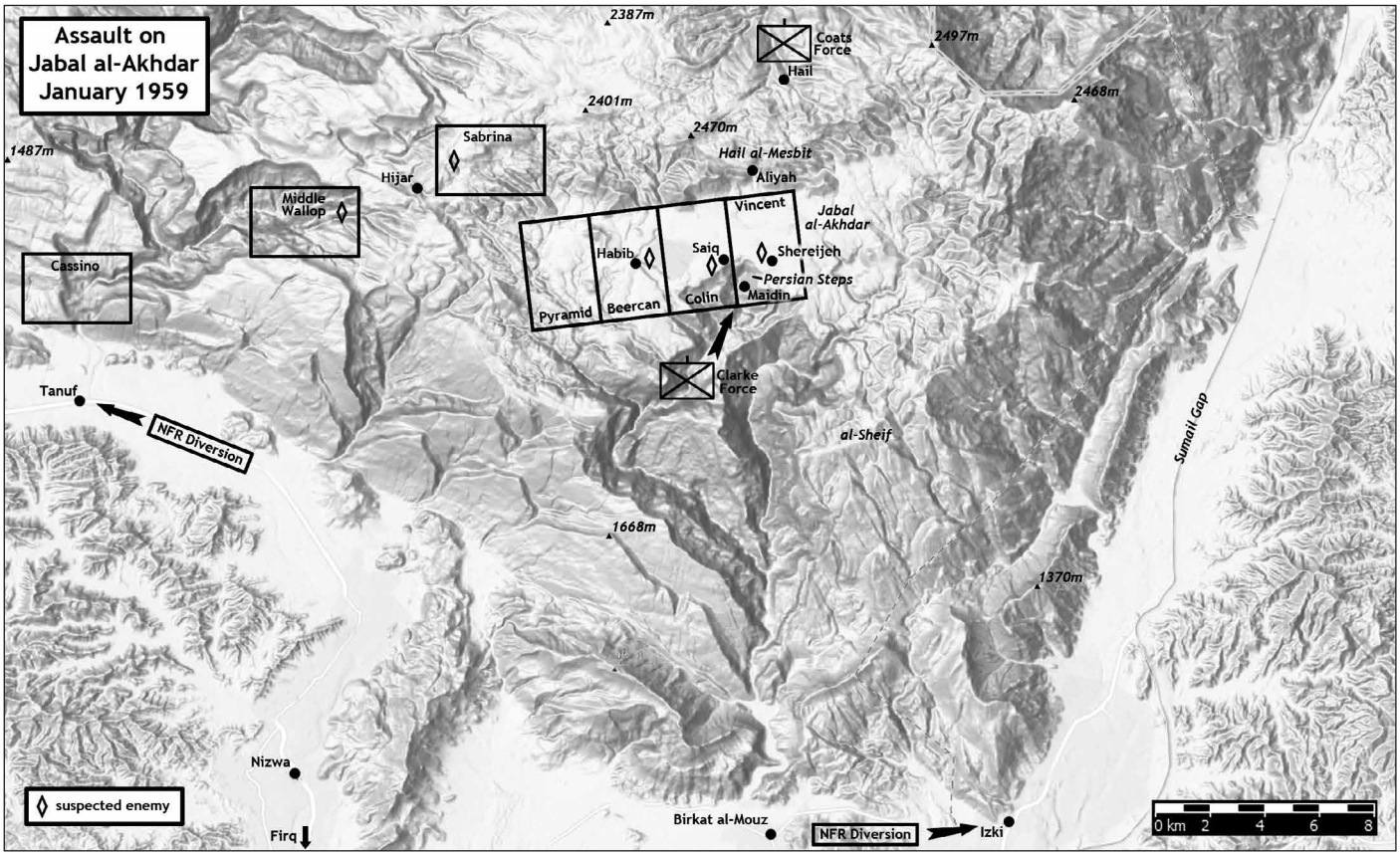
THE ASSAULT ON JEBEL AKHDAR AND SPECIAL FORCES ACTIONS

As the siege of Jebel Akhdar – the Green Mountain – continued into the winter, the failure of the strategy became clear to Colonel David Smiley. The longer the siege went on, the more reinforcements for the rebels came cross the border and the stronger the rebels' positions became. The aerial bombardment of the villages on the Jebel had failed to turn the local population against Talib, and in fact it was now likely that the rebels were in a stronger position now that they had been at the start of the siege. The roadside bombing of the valleys below the mountain continued, and the disruption of trade and commerce continued. It was time for a new approach. The request to the UK for additional support, came back as a suggestion of a precision strike, this would be more politically palatable than the use of large-scale forces, such as a mountain brigade, for the assault.

Much myth and mystery surround the SAS operations in Oman, as the restart of the history of this very special force really started in this period in Malaya. Since the Second World War the Special Air Service had not been used in the same way as it was in the past. It was disbanded in 1947, and although an attempt was made to reform it in 1950 for Korea, in the end it was not needed. However, a request was given for deployment to support the counter insurgency campaign in Malaya, where communist rebels were causing issues for the regular British forces. Under Brigadier Mike Calvert, the force known as B Squadron Malaya Scouts, was soon joined by a local volunteer force made up of Second World War SAS and Chindits formed as A Squadron. A further squadron – C Squadron – was formed from volunteers from Rhodesia. In 1952 the Regiment was added to the Army Lists as 22 SAS Regiment, however B Squadron was disbanded leaving only A and D remaining fighting in Malaya throughout the 1950s.

In 1958 the SAS was taken over by Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Deane-Drummond. The campaign in Malaya was winding up, and its new commander was actively pushing for involvement in other actions around the world. With the end of the campaign in Malaya it was possible that the regiment would again be disbanded, but Deane-Drummond was determined to find it a role. With the failure of the February 58 Plan, there was a need for a new approach to solve the issue of the rebels in the Jebel Akhdar. A formal military assessment was made and it was likely that a fully equipped division would be needed to storm the mountaintop. The British government did not consider the deployment of large-scale British forces as a viable option due to the international climate of withdrawal from empire. Deane-Drummond noted: 'The UK government is highly sensitive to accusations of meddling in another countries [sic] affairs. The operation could be called off if a fuss was made in the UK.'[1] There was a view that a Special Forces campaign would be bloodless, or at least low key, and therefore much more politically viable.

The SAS was not at full strength at this time. Each of the squadrons had four troops, A Squadron had 1, 2, 3 and 4 Troops and was commanded by Major Johnny Cooper, who had served with the original regiment in the Second World War. The squadron had a very traditional headquarters, with a sergeant major, quartermaster and clerical support, but the firepower in the squadron was much more than conventional, with modern FN rifles, Browning Machine Guns and Energa grenades. D Squadron consisted of 16, 17, 18 and 19 Troops, each troop at this time had only around 10 men, with again a squadron headquarters



Map of the Jabal al-Akhdar area, with British troop movements, insurgent positions and objective zones. (Map by Tom Cooper)

in support. D Squadron was commanded by Major Watts. The soldiers were a mixture of colonial soldiers who were looking for adventure, those old boys who had served in the regiment in the war, and a few new volunteers looking for adventure in the jungles of Malaya, many of whom had been Chindits in the war. Such a mixed group of soldiers had been highly successful in the jungles of Malaya, and the legend of the regiment was very much reborn in the legacy. Much of Dean-Drummond's determination to use the regiment in more specialist operations was born out of a desire to show the utility of the force and keep it alive.

The village of Saiq that was the scene of heavy fighting during the assault. (Author's collection)

As planning started, a small reconnaissance party arrived in Oman and looked at options. Dean-Drummond flew to Oman, getting instructions from the UK, and linking in with Colonel David Smiley. The pair did an aerial reconnaissance of the Jebel and got a clear understanding of the scale of the enterprise at hand. Initially, there was a suggestion that a selective assassination campaign could be conducted against the leaders of the rebellion; the reconnaissance commander commented that 'if Talib is killed the revolt will certainly collapse'.[2] This initial idea of using SAS soldiers to target and assassinate rebel leaders in the Jebel Akhdar was outlined in the Operational Report of the SAS and was given considerable thought in the planning stages.[3] Subsequently the idea of using these killer squads was dropped not because of the morality or impact on the civilian population, but because of a lack of intelligence provided by the locals due to the unpopularity of the Sultan. It was simply that the SAS could not get the right intelligence from the locals who generally supported the rebels under Talib.

On arrival in Oman, the SAS Commanding Officer Deane-Drummond worked with Colonel David Smiley to set up a joint SAS, Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Air Force Headquarters. This Tactical Headquarters or 'Tac HQ' was to be based in Nizwa. The Regimental Headquarters and support staff of the SAS formed the basis of this, but RAF ground support staff allowed close coordination with the air power. Deane-Drummond was appointed as temporary Deputy Commander of the Sultan's Armed Forces, to prevent any issues with him giving orders on the ground to the various units from different countries. The quartermaster's department of the SAS also arrived shortly after, it worked with the RAF ground crew to improve the airstrip at Nizwa allowing a steady supply of equipment and stores to the fighting troops. This Tac HQ reported directly to Colonel David Smiley who commanded the Sultan's Armed Forces from Muscat. This relationship allowed the SAS a clear command responsibility within the area of operations, stopping any confusion between the various forces.

The Tactical Headquarters was much smaller than a normal British Army battalion headquarters, but the large logistical tail still deployed to the country with much of the larger equipment staying in Masirah or following up from Malaya. A detachment of Royal Signals was deployed to enable communications both back to the SAF Headquarters in Muscat and back to the UK. An RAF officer from Bahrain who was described by Dean-Drummond as 'very fit', a particular compliment from an SAS officer, joined as the tactical air controller. A number of Loan Service or Contract Officers were seconded for their local expertise, including Major Malcolm Dennison the SAF Intelligence Officer, and Major Tony Hart from the Muscat Regiment who worked with the local tribes. This rather diverse headquarters was given an even more chaotic feel by the various Omani units present in the camp, which was also headquarters of the Northern Frontier Regiment, as well as Somali donkey drivers who had been paid to support the units. All of this was coordinated and controlled by the Regimented Operations Officer Captain John Spreull who, with no maps, limited intelligence, and forces from Oman, the Trucial States, the RAF, Regular British Army, Somalian support and of course the SAS, had to bring order to the chaos. Dean-Drummond said of John Spreull simply that 'he was in charge'. Spreull was used to such arrangements having dealt with similar set ups with the local forces in Malaya.

The high plateau of Jebel Akhdar is incredible in its scale, even today those who visit it cannot help but be impressed by its imposing nature and enormous cliff faces. The main road from Muscat to Izki and then on to Nizwa leads through the Sumail Gap. The Gap is a valley with sheer facing sides reaching to over 8,000 feet in height on either side. The western side leads up to the high plateau of Jebel Akhar, the Green Mountain. The town of Izki is at the base of the valley, and like all Omani towns has a small fort and a tribal elder. At this point the valley splits and by continuing west you reach the town of Nizwa, with its dominating round tower fort and large market. If you continue south, you reach the

A Land Rover destroyed by a mine in Wadi Hajis. (Michael Clinch collection)

desert and Empty Quarter beyond. Between Izki and Nizwa, and further to the small village of Tanuf, a series of re-entrants reach up into the mountains, allowing access on old stone paths. One of these from Birket to Maidin follows the Persian Steps, an actual staircase made of rock, which leads up to the mountain top.

The high plateau itself is dominated by numerous ridge lines, some with carved out fields supporting the local agricultural system. From the mountain side run the falaj networks, miniature canals that draw water from within the mountain and bring it to the fields and villages, supplying fresh water all year round. There are many villages and hamlets in the mountains lived in by the Jabali people (or mountain people). The key villages were Habib, Saiq and Sharaijah which sat on the top of the high plateau, tucked into the rocky outcrops and blending into their surroundings. The terrain was some of the hardest to climb and live in, never mind fight a battle across.

The population of the Jebel Akhdar plateau is largely dominated by the Bani Riyam tribe, whose descendants live in the neighbouring towns of Izki and Nizwa. The Bani Riyam are part of the Ghafari tribe, one of the two main tribes of Oman, but crucially have links to some Sunni elements of Saudi Arabia, allowing Talib to link to family connections in the wider region. The difference in tribal affiliation between the Ghafari and the largely Ibadi Hinawi have led to many of the ancient conflicts in Oman. The Hinawi and Ghafari came together in their support for the Iman with power alliances over their nomination of Iman and also to produce the Treaty of Seeb. The distrust between the two communities continued, with many of the soldiers in the Sultan's Armed Forces who were Ghafari having split loyalties at this time. Although of ancient links, the Sultan himself came from a small Hinawi tribe, the Azdy of the Banu Hiba. Although a minor link, it still gave some ties of loyalty in comparison to the Sunni majority of the Ghafari.

The next element of planning looked at a general assault against the mountain top, looking at options from parachuting onto the top, to a covert ascent at night. Despite the initial consideration of the operation being that the Special Forces operation would be low key, the actual planning led to the execution of a mission which would be very much a conventional assault. Despite being conventional, it would however involve a much smaller force than a division and be made up of troops that were used to acting independently in the jungle and used to intense fighting. There was little consideration for the population of the mountains specifically regarding subsequent development and stability operations as the planning documents did not indicate that the SAS were planning on staying for the long-term after the assault. However, the SAS did have a record of conducting such counter insurgency operations in the jungle of Malaya combined with these shock assault tactics, and it could be that the planning simply would have been a subsequent phase.

The plan that was decided upon for the SAS assault was confirmed as a conventional operation to destroy the enemy, with an unequivocal mission statement to this effect: '22 SAS will penetrate the Jebel Akhdar to kill or capture the rebel leaders Talib, Ghalib and Suleiman and their followers.'[4] It is notable that in the 16-page operational order No.1, that goes into a considerable amount of detail, including the logistical provision of 80 sets of sunglasses and two kitchen sweepers,[5] no mention is made of post-conflict operations or development. The Sultan's Armed Forces, who had been sieging the mountain as part of the February 58 Plan, detached two troops of the Life Guards and two troops of Trucial Oman Scouts to support the SAS during their operation.[6] In addition two 5.5" guns, two 75mm pack howitzers[7] and C Company NFR was attached to the assault. The RAF was tasked to provide a considerable force; eight Venom bombers flew 32 sorties and four Shackleton bombers dropped twelve 1,000-pound bombs on the approaches.[8] The operation to assault Jebel Akhdar was not one of a surgical strike utilising 'minimum force' but one of overwhelming firepower and mass attack. The force assaulting now consisted of two squadrons of SAS, two companies of infantry, a half-squadron of light armour, a half artillery battery and huge amounts of air support; a strong battle group able to pack a considerable punch.

The scale of the RAF support to the operations in Northern Oman can be seen by the long list of aircraft in support. From 1955 to 1959 there were 19 different squadrons involved in the operations. At the peak of operations in late 1958 in direct support to the operation were 8 Squadron with four Venom fighter-bombers; 37, 42, 228 and 224 Squadrons all flying Shackleton MR2 reconnaissance and ground support missions; 208 Squadron flying Metor FR 9 on reconnaissance missions; 58 Squadron flying Canberra PR 7 on reconnaissance missions; 84 Squadron flying logistical support missions with Valetta and Beverley aircraft; and 152 Squadron flying Pembroke and Twin Pioneer aircraft for light transport and communications. In addition, HMS *Bulwark* supported with 849 Naval Air Squadron armed with Skyraider reconnaissance aircraft and 801 and 891 Squadrons armed with

Sea Hawk and Sea Venom ground attack aircraft. This huge air effort gave incredible amounts of intelligence and fire support to the attacking units. Shackletons were also used to drop leaflets on the local population to warn them of impending action.

The RAF in the Middle East at this time was largely based at the main British bases, these included Sharjah in the Trucial Oman States, Bahrein and Masirah Island. These units worked under Middle East Command, based out of Aden under the command of Air Vice Marshall Sir William MacDonald from 1958 to 1962. The air base on Masirah Island was very isolated and could only be supplied by sea. Once supplies were landed there, they were moved by a small narrow-gauge railway to the airbase. The strategic location of this base allowed refuelling of aircraft between Bahrain and RAF Khormaksar in Aden.

For six weeks after their arrival in Oman the force trained and built up ready for the assault. The soldiers practised night marches with heavy packs over the huge mountain tops. They went on patrols to observation posts around the Jebel, looking out for enemy positions and understanding their layout. A number of initial assaults were conducted by D Squadron, who were still awaiting the arrival of A Squadron. On one of these patrols, where the squadron moved up the mountain side, an SAS Corporal was shot and killed by a sniper and the two troops who were moving up this route were pinned down. Fortunately, 16 and 17 Troops used the Persian Steps route up the mountain and outflanked the enemy. Throughout November and December, small actions took place on the mountainside, with the SAS isolating enemy positions and destroying them with grenades, in hand-to-hand fighting and with Carl Gustav rockets.

From 8 to 22 January, D Squadron and A Company Northern Frontier Regiment conducted offensive patrols in the Tanuf area, seizing the high ground held by the rebels. This was followed between 18 and 22 January with A Squadron supported by the squadron of the Trucial Oman Scouts making similar offensive patrols in Aquabat al Dhafar and Tanuf. This allowed the objective to be isolated. There were a lot of lessons from these initial operations, the key point was that more forces and more concentration of firepower would be needed to assault the final stronghold of the enemy. The full battle group would be needed to cut off any enemy retreat and escape back into the population. The objective was broken into three; CASSINO, WIDDLE WALLOP and SABRINA; they dominated the ridgeline to the north west of the high plateau above the village of Saiq. This ridgeline was held by the rebels as it was a known route up the mountain, but it involved a 6,000-foot assent to the top, which stood just under 8,000 feet above sea level and included huge sheer face slopes and rocky outcrops and caves where the enemy could hide. It would be the SAS squadrons which would assault these slopes.

During the nights before the assault on 23 and 24 January, A Company and C Company of the Northern Frontier Regiment launched assaults on Izki and Tanuf to divert the attention of the rebel commanders. The assaults were supported by the huge firepower of the RAF, making the impression that this was the main objective. As part of this deception, the local donkey drivers who supported the battle group were told that the follow-on assault against the main rebel positions would be made via Tanuf, linking it with the NFR assault. This information went back to the rebels and caused them to adjust their positions.

Much has been written on the operation to seize the mountain top. The 25 to 26 January final assault is legendary in the annals of Special Forces history but what must be remembered is that this battle group included not just the SAS, but regular British soldiers in the Life Guards and large numbers of Omani and Trucial Oman Scouts. The plan was decided as a three-phase operation. Phase one would be the capture of the initial break-in points (called BEERCAN, COLIN and VINCENT in true British fashion) by A Squadron SAS. The second phase would see C Company Northern Frontier Regiment relive the SAS and hold the initial position, and a troop of the Life Guards, operating dismounted, to hold the peak of the mountain. The third phase would see both A and C Squadrons SAS assault the final enemy positions. To isolate the mountain, a force of 50 local tribesmen held the southern slope under Major Clarke, and to the north 200 Abyreen tribesmen, with a platoon of Muscat Regiment under Major Coats (both Clarke and Coats were Contract Officers). Two helicopters were based at Nizwa to evacuate casualties.

The number of enemy on the mountain was very much unknown, but estimates vary from a few hundred to over a thousand. The diversionary attack by the NFR certainly made an impact on the enemy and caused much confusion. Elements of D Squadron joined the NFR and immediately after the SAS were moved by lorry to the rendezvous at Wadi Tanuf with the remainder of the battlegroup. As the SAS led the advance up the mountainside, followed by the Northern Frontier Regiment and dismounted Life Guards, they came upon a sleeping sentry position, where they were left to sleep with an SAS guard looking over them. Lieutenant Colonel Deane-Drummond decided to drop the soldier's heavy packs and get onto the high ground. This night move, at speed, over difficult terrain, allowed the SAS to seize BEERCAN unopposed. With dawn the fighting started and 3,000lbs (1,361kg) of supplies were dropped by the RAF, persuading many of the rebels that a parachute attack had started. Talib at this point fled and got through the units surrounding the mountain via the many hidden routes. The only casualties of the assault were three soldiers, two of which were killed when a bullet hit a grenade in an SAS soldier's backpack. Although evacuated by helicopter alive, two were too badly wounded. The helicopter came under fire as it landed, but the artillery support from the valley silenced the enemy mortars.

To the south, the irregular forces under Major Clarke had shrunk to 15, with the majority fleeing with the start of the fighting. The 200 Abyreen irregulars under Major Coats had likewise shrunk to 70. It is likely that the lack of this isolation force allowed Talib to escape with its ineffectiveness. The operation was a military success in the conventional sense of the word, with the rebels cleared from the mountains; 130 rebels were captured for the loss of three SAS killed and two wounded.[9] During the whole operation most of the reports back to Tac Headquarters SAS were of enemy numbers killed rather than the effect on the rebellion.[10] This again reinforces the suggestion of a conventional assault focusing on the defeat of the enemy, but also of an assault that was not clandestine and very much required the support of wide-ranging military assets to achieve its aims. 'Before we [the SAS] did it most experienced officers said they would not look at it with under a trained mountain brigade.'[11] However, despite this praise of the fighting forces, it is noticeable that the assault was supported by regular troops from the Life Guards in a dismounted role as well as a company of the Northern Frontier Regiment, which remained after the operation. This lack of specialist use of the SAS is later reflected upon by the Commanding Officer of the SAS who states, 'as it turned out, it might have been a task which could also have been done by any well-trained battalion

The fort at Saiq, garrisoned by the Northern Frontier Regiment, seen in 1964. (Tony Calder collection)

Another view of the SAF fort at Saiq, Jebel al-Akhdar. (Christopher Hinton collection)

Terraced fields on Jebel Akhdar. (Christopher Hinton collection)

of all regulars'.[12] Again, this shows the conventional nature of the assault, rather than the perceived surgical strike that is alluded to in modern literature.

With the ending of the assault, the occupation of the mountain was largely undertaken by the Sultan's Armed Forces. The Northern Frontier Regiment took up positions in the villages at the top of the mountain and started clearing a landing strip to allow for rapid resupply. The Muscat Regiment also reinforced the positions around the mountain, with the Life Guards providing armoured escort to convoys in the valley. The SAS soldiers pulled back into the valley and regrouped after the assault and pulled back to Muscat on 6 February 1959 for rest and to organise their next operations. During this time the occupation and detailed clearance of the mountain took place with Omani forces and the various governors and intelligence staff from Muscat went to work. The rebel leaders had left hundreds of documents in their haste to flee, and much intelligence could be gathered from these. Also, the hunt for the leaders continued, despite an expectation that they had long fled.

The SAS returned to the mountain and conducted a series of patrols for a two week period from 13-26 February 1959.[13] The focus of these patrols was not to link into the location population, or to support redevelopment but to 'produce a complete dossier on the Jebel for use if a rebellion ever breaks out again'.[14] These patrols over the Jebel comprised not only of SAS, but also Northern Frontier Regiment soldiers from the company that remained in occupation. The operational order for the SAS stated that: 'It is essential to know a great deal more about the terrain

and to impress occupants of the Jebel with a show of force by Flag marches.'[15]

In some sense these patrols were seen as good training for the SAS, with heavy packs over mountain terrain, they were the staple operations which these soldiers who had conducted long jungle patrols were used to. Patrol maps showed extensive marches through the many villages and hamlets in the mountain range, with no real resistance at this point.

There was a nod to a future development campaign in the orders given to these mountain patrols, but not to actively assist, more around information gathering. The patrol orders described the needs of food, irrigation and housing: 'Patrols will be courteous and make friends with the civil population, at the same time, patrols will enquire whether there are any problems or needs in the village, whether there is a food shortage or a requirement for an item essential for village reconstruction or rehabilitation.'[16]

The population of the village of Kitna, seen in 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)

The main road to Fangerr. (Michael Clinch collection)

However, despite the extremely comprehensive patrol reports, the Special Forces themselves did little to alleviate the basic needs of the local population, having no resources or equipment to do so. The information was written in patrol reports, down to the details of tribal leaders and elders, and the numbers of houses in each village. The reports formed the basis of intelligence documents which went back to Sultan's Armed Forces Headquarters, which would be responsible for planning the next steps.

The three main villages on top of the mountain were largely destroyed, with buildings reduced to rubble by the bombing of the Royal Air Force, and the falaj system – vital for hundreds of years as a method of irrigation and water supply for drinking in this arid climate – was largely destroyed. Deane-Drummond commenting on the clash of opinion between the military and the Sultan over what should be done next. There was an assumption that Waterfield – the Sultan's Military Secretary – wanted to do nothing, 'possibly because it is cheapest'.[17] This lack of active development led to the opinion within the visiting military units that 'this policy will lead to another rebellion in a few years' time'.[18] Because of the lack of support for the local population, the forces on the Jebel seem to have acted as much more of an occupation force suppressing the population, than utilising any hearts and minds approach.

From 9 February the RAF units and ground support staff were moved out of Oman. In addition, by the end of the month the regular Life Guards left along with the remainder of the SAS units. 152 Squadron, flying Pembroke and Twin Pioneer aircraft for light transport and communications, remained to support the new airstrip at Saiq on the high plateau and support the construction of the garrison. From this point on it was the Sultan's Armed Forces who would continue to garrison previously rebel-held areas, and support any potential reconstruction effort. The Northern Frontier Regiment took up garrison on top of the Jebel and began to build the start of a defensive camp to dominate the plateau. Much of the damage to the villages was irreparable in the short-term, and many who had the choice left the mountain to live with relatives in the valley below. The scars of war on the mountain top can be seen to this day, complete with the wreckage of a lone RAF fighter-bomber.

The old muzzle-loading cannons fire a salute in Muscat. (Christopher Hinton collection)

The Special Forces operation on Jebel Akhdar was not an operation that was traditional for clandestine Special Forces; it was a conventional attack by highly trained and motivated shock troops to defeat a determined enemy. It severely reduced the capability of the rebels as a fighting force; all heavy weapons were captured, including two heavy machine guns and 3" and 81mm mortars.[19] The leaders of the rebellion were dispersed, however, as seen after the defeat of the rebels in Ibri in 1955 and Nizwa in 1957, they had the ability to regroup and continue the fight. The success of operations in Oman was widely reported in the media of the time;[20] however, even in this media perspective, it was made evident that significant air power played a part in the operation.[21] This took away from the involvement of ground troops, which was much more palatable to the government in the colonial context.

The British government in January 1959 opted to use 22 SAS as a more discreet and deniable means of defeating the rebellion.[22] This use of discrete forces was repeated when considering operations in Dhufar a decade later: 'In September 1972, the Chiefs of Staff Committee did approve the deployment of a battle group… There was a pronounced fear in Whitehall that Britain could be drawn into a debilitating counter insurgency campaign similar to that the USA had been embroiled in with Vietnam.'[23]

Despite the 'deniability' of the SAS involvement, allowing British intervention on a larger scale, the operation did not achieve an end to the insurgency. The failure to capture the rebel leaders meant that the insurgency could continue and would do so for some years. However, it was clear that the reduction of the intensity of the insurgency was linked to the destruction of rebel forces on Jebel Akhdar. The underlying causes of the insurgency had not been dealt with by the operations of the SAS, the reality was that the operation was very much conventional and relied heavily on air power, artillery and the support of other conventional forces. The Jebel Akhdar operation is often perceived in the same light as the later Dhufar insurgency, where the traditional perspective is that the insurgency was beaten almost bloodlessly by Special Forces, development projects and a native home guard.[24] However, the reality is considerably different, and the operation was very much a conventional one.

A memorable post-script to the assault is provided by Frank Kitson in his book *Bunch of Fives*, which sums up the strangeness of this conflict. Less than a month after the assault, the SAF Intelligence Officer Major Malcolm Dennison gained intelligence that Talib and Suleiman were hiding in Sharqiyah. Despite being ordered to wait, the Commanding Officer of the Northern Frontier Regiment went with a small party to the house to arrest him. He knocked on the door and asked if the Iman was there, and was told no. Kitson claims that Talib, who was in the house said to Suleiman 'Shall I shoot this stupid Nasrani?', and Suleiman responded 'No, he is not worth it, let him be.'[25] The truth of this is hard to prove, but we know that the three rebel leaders soon after escaped to Saudi Arabia.

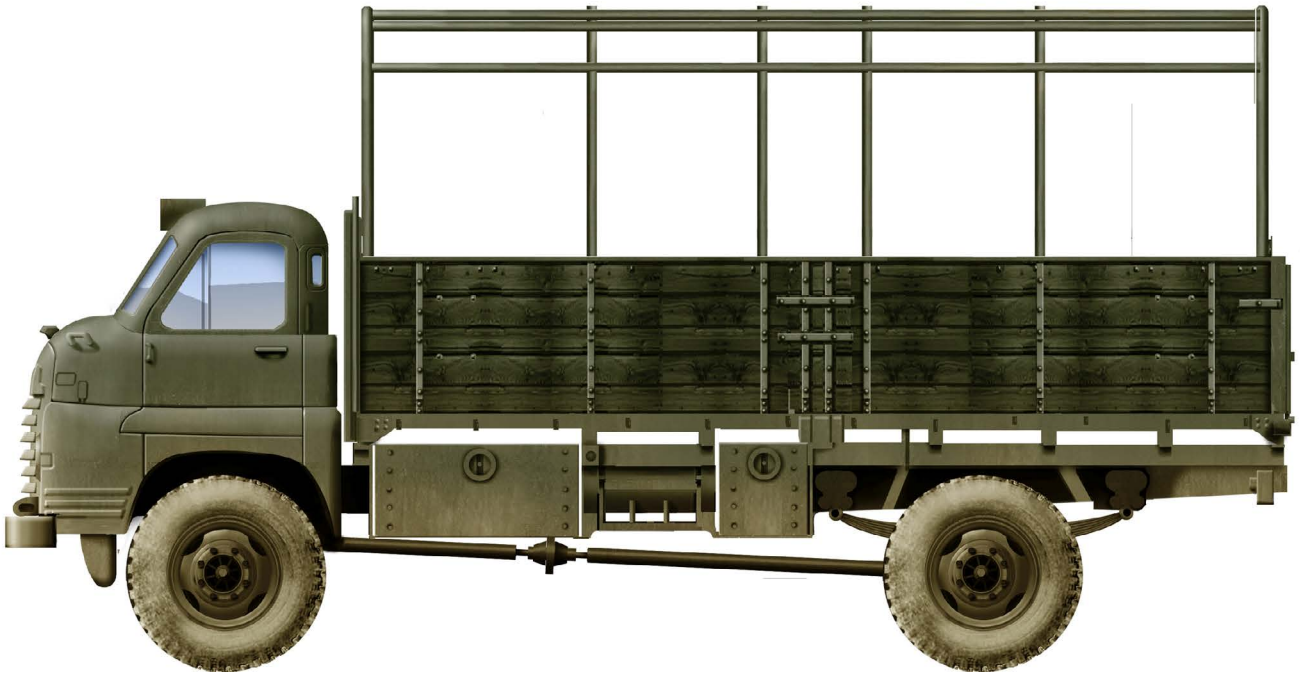
With the ending of this phase of the campaign the Special Air Service involvement evolved into legend and myth. It was not the last involvement in Northern Oman, with a specific operation taking place 10 years later in the Musandam Peninsula on the Straits of Hormuz. Operation Intradon saw the SAS conduct a parachute operation into Musandam in order to secure the area for the Sultan against the perceived rebellious Shihuh of Musandam and a resurgent Oman Liberation Army, under the name of the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf. With the start of the insurgency in the south of Oman, relations between the Sultan's Armed Forces and the SAS continued, and therefore such an opportunity to conduct this specialist operation was made possible.

The National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf was formed in Iraq by a number of Omani students. It had left-wing origins and was supported by some urban intellectuals. Its links to Talib were not fully defined, but it is likely that living in Saudi Arabia he gave the group his support in the hope of reigniting the insurgency in support of his brother.

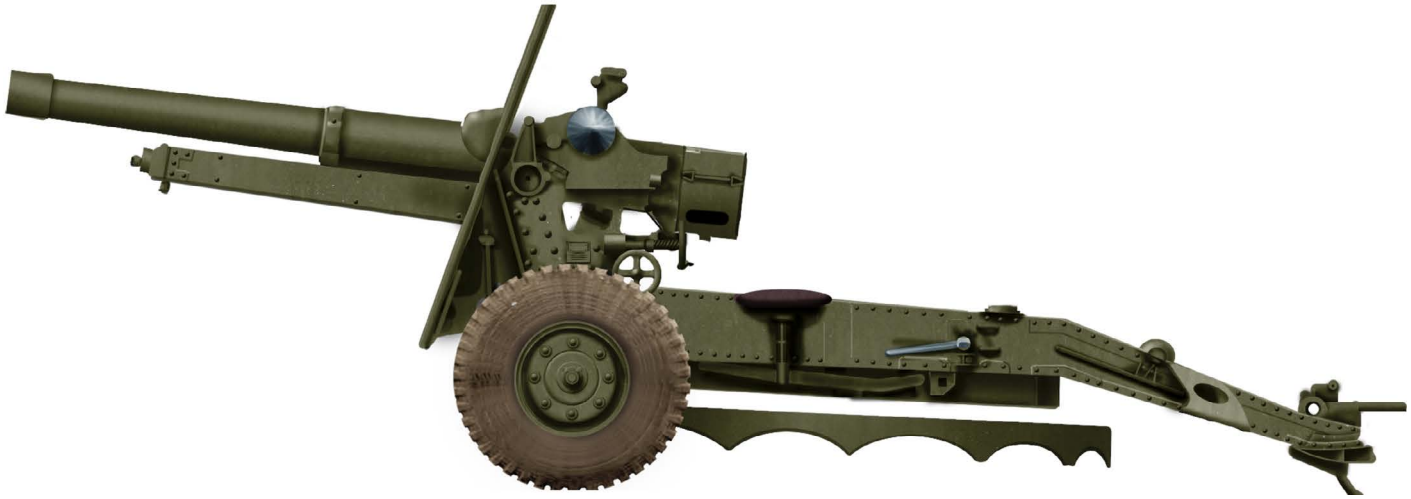
The first operations by the group started on 12 June 1970 when two small groups attacked the garrisons at Nizwa and Izki. In Nizwa the group set up an improvised explosive device, but it failed to explode. In Izki an eleven-man party attacked the garrison. The camp commander, Captain Charles Hepworth assembled an ad hoc force from the few soldiers not on Friday leave and launched an aggressive counterattack. Ten of the attackers were killed or wounded, and the eleventh, although he escaped, was captured a few weeks later.[26] The captured insurgents were quickly questioned and gave up the locations of their three weapon dumps. The campaign of the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf was over before it really had begun.

However, although the 12 June attacks were defeated, they led to a feeling that Sultan Sa'id was unable to hold his country.

The 15th/19th Hussars deployed with the then brand-new Ferret armoured cars (left) in Oman, in support of the 1st Cameronian Highlanders. The unit was relieved by the 13th/18th Hussars in 1957, and then the Life Guards, a year later. Thanks to its turret-mounted 7.62mm machine gun, the vehicle provided considerable firepower, while well-protected against small-arms fire. The Land Rover (right) was the workhorse of the Sultan's Armed Forces, used for all general movements and to haul supplies. They proved capable of navigating the most difficult terrain in Oman, where other vehicles were often limited to the roads. (Artworks by David Bocquelet)

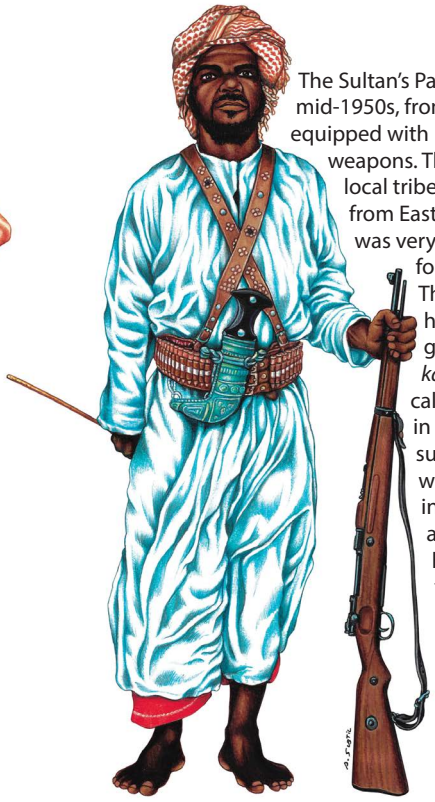


Based on the older Bedford SCL, built for civilian purposes, the Bedford RL was the main medium lorry of the British Army from the 1950s well into the 1970s. The military version had an all-wheel drive and bigger wheels with increased ground clearance, making it capable of comfortably carrying 4 tonnes of equipment, ammunition or personnel across the country. Principally equipped with two rows of wooden bench-seating along the entire length of the bed, with a rain/sun tarpaulin cover supported by steel-tube frame, they were used to tow 25-pdr guns, and for troop transport and logistic purposes. Elements of the Trucial Oman Scouts used these trucks to support their forces in the campaign. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



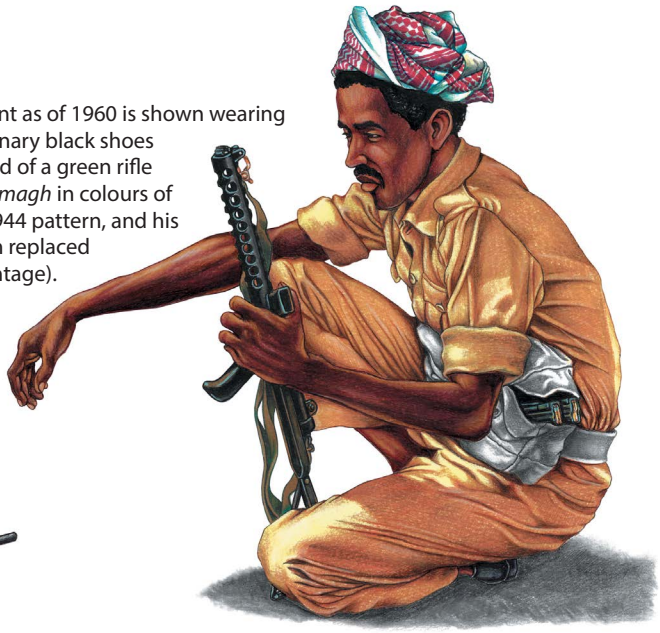
The first Omani artillery unit was established in 1955 and was originally only a troop in size. Initially during the campaign, it consisted of a 75mm gun position at Tanuf and a 5.5-in gun position at Kamah, nevertheless, it provided considerable firepower. In 1960, four Ordnance QF 25-pounder (or simply 25-pdr) field guns, shown here, were added to the troop. Originally developed during the Second World War, this proved to be a most outstanding field artillery piece and remained in service with British and Commonwealth forces well afterwards. Unsurprisingly, 25-pdrs significantly bolstered the firepower, precision and range of the sole Omani gun troop. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

This British soldier of the 1st Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) is shown wearing only the shorts of the British Khaki Drill uniform, while his head is protected from the sun by a bush-hat and the fabric of a t-shirt. His boots and puttees are of standard British issue, but in the desert pattern. The standard 1944 Belt Kit contains only the characteristic pouches and a Mark III bayonet. He is also shown wearing a bandolier with spare ammunition for his main weapon: a No. 4 Lee-Enfield rifle. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)



The Sultan's Palace Guard was formed in the mid-1950s, from small groups of Omani Askaris equipped with British- and Belgian-made light weapons. They were usually recruited from local tribes loyal to the government or from East African Muslims. Their garment was very similar to that worn by tribes form the interior of the country. This one is shown wearing a humble, ankle-long, collarless gown called the *dishdasha* or *kandura*, and a typical turban called a *mussar*: the latter excelled in protecting the head from the sun in summer and keeping it warm in winter. His military gear included crossed suspenders and a bullet belt, over another belt for his richly decorated *khanjar* (a traditional dagger). His firearm is a Czechoslovak-made vz.24 bolt-action rifle. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)

This soldier of the Northern Frontier Regiment as of 1960 is shown wearing the light British-style khaki uniform and ordinary black shoes or short boots. His official headgear consisted of a green rifle cap, but this was usually replaced by the *shemagh* in colours of his tribe. The webbing is of British 1937 or 1944 pattern, and his firearm is a Sterling sub-machine gun (which replaced the classic Sten gun of Second World War vintage). (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)



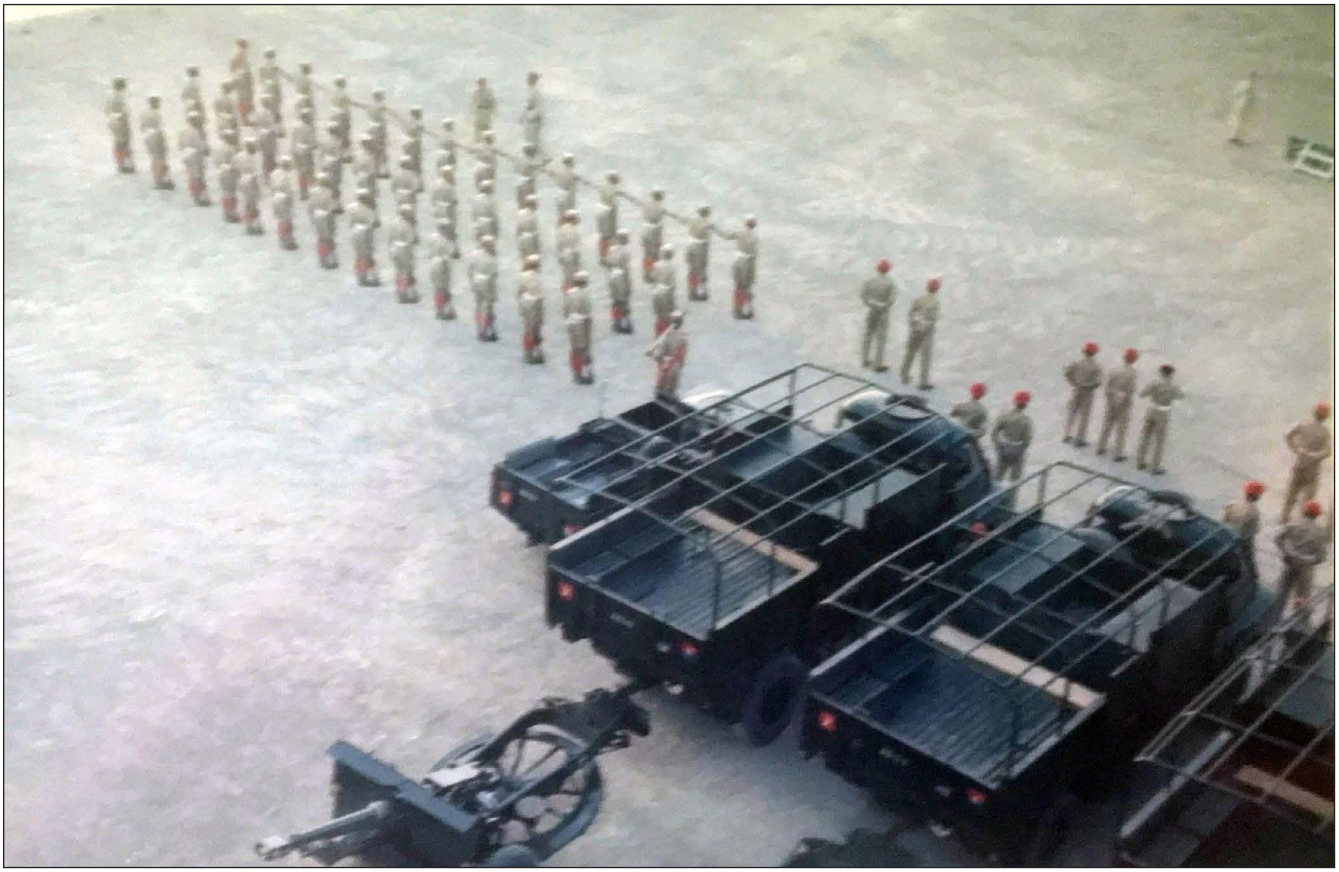
This sniper from 22 SAS Regiment is shown as seen in 1959, wearing a Denison Parachute Smock in the British 'Windproof' pattern – in a version introduced immediately after the Second World War. His green combat trousers were a part of the British Tropical Battle Dress, and his woollen cap is the same as used by the British commandos. He is shown wearing a standard 1944 Canvas Belt and armed with a modified version of a No. 4 Mk. I (T) Lee-Enfield rifle, equipped with scope pads, a wooden cheek-rest, third sling swivel in front of the magazine, and T32 3.5x telescopic sight in a one-piece mount. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)

The RAF continuously rotated detachments of jet fighters to Sharjah airport during the war in Northern Oman of 1954-1962. Amongst the types and units known to have served there between 1952 and 1955 were Venom FB.Mk 1s from No. 6 Squadron (from Habbaniya/Iraq) and Venom FB.Mk 1s from No. 208 Squadron (Abu Suweir/Egypt). Venom FB.Mk 4s from No. 249 Squadron (home-based at Akrotiri/Cyprus, and illustrated here) and (Khorrmaksar/Aden-based) No. 8 Squadron served tours in 1956-1957. Their strikes were usually called in by air contact teams, which worked with the SAF. All Venom FB.Mk 4s wore standardised camouflage pattern in dark green (BS381C/641) and dark sea grey (BS381C/638) overall, with PRU Blue under: the squadron badge was usually applied on the nose, but No. 249 Squadron's jets wore their code in that place. Serials were applied in black on the boom and on bottom wing surfaces. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)

Avro Shackletons – drawn either from RAF Coastal Command, early on (Nos. 42, 224 and 228 Squadrons), or from the Khormaksar-based No. 37 Squadron, RAF, later on – saw intensive service in Oman in the 1950s. Early during the 1950s, it was primarily the MR.Mk 1A that saw action, always forward deployed at Masirah air base: this was successively replaced by MR.Mk 2, and then MR.Mk 2C. Illustrated here is one of the latter, as operated by No. 37 Squadron in the late 1950s. The aircraft was painted in white atop of the fuselage, and dark sea grey (BS381C/638) elsewhere: the code D and the squadron number were applied in red, outlined in white, while the serial – WL757 – was applied in red below the service title on the rear fuselage. Shackletons not only dropped leaflets and bombs, but frequently deployed their two 20mm nose-mounted cannons. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

The British supported Oman throughout the war in the north in the 1950s. Their help included the provision of four de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver AL.Mk 1s from British Army stocks. The aircraft were initially painted as shown here, in white overall, with a black anti-glare panel in front of the cockpit and a red cheat line. Serials were applied in black on the rear fuselage and repeated on lower wing surfaces, while national markings are known to have been applied on the fin only. Home-based in Seeb (and, much later on, organised into No. 5 Squadron, Sultan of Oman Air Force), they were used for a wide range of tasks, including liaison, reconnaissance and MEDEVAC. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

The Wali of Iski's messenger in 1963. (Christopher Hinton Collection)



25-pounders, Bedford trucks, Land Rovers and gunners of the SAF Artillery troop in 1963. (Christopher Hinton Collection)

The Baluch Company of the Muscat Regiment on operations in the Samail Gap, note the 'Jebel Donkey' in support. (Michael Clinch Collection)

The Muscat Regiment conducting operations in the Jebel, supported by Helicopters from HMS *Bulwark*. (Michael Clinch Collection)

Desert patrol to Balah by the Desert Intelligence Officers and Intelligence GSO2 of SAF in 1963. (Christopher Hinton Collection)

A Beaver of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force, next to an unmarked Fairchild C-82 Packet, in the early 1960s. (Tony Calder Collection)

A Percival Provost trainer and ground attack aircraft of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force: note the underwing launch rails for Sura unguided rockets. (Claudio Tosselli, via Tom Cooper)

Jellali Fort, used by the Sultan as a prison; a guard was provided from Guard Company of the Sultans Armed Forces. (Christopher Hinton Collection)

The Headquarters of the SAF at Bait al Falaj, seen from the air in 1963. (Christopher Hinton Collection)

Oman
1955-1970
IRAN
al-Khasab
Musandam
Peninsula
Limah
Ras al-Khaimah
Umm al-Quwain
Sharjah
Dubai
Madha
Persian Gulf
Gulf of Oman
Abu Dhabi
Suhar
Buraimi
Wadi Jizzi
al-Khaburah
TRUCIAL STATES
(UNITED ARAB EMIRATES)
Seeb
Mafrah
Musqat (Muscat)
Bayt al-Falag
Jebel Akhdar
Rostaq
Bidbid
Saia
Nizwa
Izki
Oil pipeline
Sur
Fahud
Wahiba Sands
KINGDOM OF
SAUDI ARABIA
Rub al-Khali
('Empty Quarter')
MUSCAT & OMAN
Masirah
Arabian Sea
Thumrait
(Midway)
Jebel
Kuria Muria Islands
Salalah
Mirbat
ADEN
PROTECTORATE
al-Ghaydah
Indian Ocean

The Sultan's Armed Forces and intelligence organisations had been caught off-guard. The news in Musandam was of possible rebel involvement and the idea of the Omanis not holding the key Straits of Hormuz was extremely worrying for the British. A new unit – the Oman Gendarmerie – was formed and had the task of occupying the peninsula and ensuring its security, however there was a fear that this untrained unit would not be able to defeat a determined enemy, and the shadow of the Oman Regiment's defeat 15 years before worried those in power.

The operation was simple in design, with the Trucial Oman Scouts blocking exit routes to the west, and Sultan's Armed Forces blocking movement south. The SAS parachuted into the peninsula and met no resistance, in fact the locals were very friendly and the occupation then by the Oman Gendarmerie went well. This footnote in the history of the conflict in Northern Oman, and with its relationship with the SAS, showed again how the perception of a surgical strike by small groups of determined men was seen as much more palatable to the British than any large-scale intervention.

Later, in 1971, another armed group, this time from Ra's al-Khaymah, started to operate in the peninsula. Decisive action was taken, with elements of the Muscat Regiment flown into al-Bay'ah to assault the insurgents, killing two and capturing one. It was the last major incident in the area, and one of the final events in the north. The rebellion was finally declared to be defeated in January 1976, although isolated incidents took place as late as 1979.

4
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES

In comparison to the widely published assault on Jebel Akhdar, the development of the Sultan's Armed Forces at this time remains largely unknown and not examined in much detail. However, this development was critical to long-term stability in Northern Oman and helped deal with many of the long-term causes of the war. To defeat the insurgency within Northern Oman considerable effort was put into the development and expansion of the Sultan's Armed Forces; this expansion concerned both military capability and also preserving the loyalty of the units and individuals within the Sultan's Armed Forces. This development took place over a number of stages, firstly the initial development after the defeat of the Oman Regiment, but then subsequent development post the SAS assault on Jebel Akhdar.

In 1955, the Sultan's Armed Forces had only basic training and capabilities, it relied for mass on levies of tribal soldiers, some of whom were armed with ancient rifles and had received little or no training in fighting. However, most men in Oman knew how to shoot, it was very much engrained in their culture. The forces of the Iman were equally as poor in quality, and hence the success of the 1955 expedition into the interior. That said, with a small amount of training in Saudi Arabia, even the relatively weak assault of the Imam's forces against the Oman Regiment in 1957 caused them to be comprehensively defeated. It was evident therefore that development was required to defeat the rebels militarily, to provide long-term stability and to police the population within Northern Oman.

In 1950 the Sultan's Armed Forces had no central headquarters or operational structure, and was based around three forces acting as garrisons to the major towns. The Muscat Force, Batina Force and Salalah Force were largely defensive in nature. The Muscat and Oman Field Force was a tribal structure, raised only when required from local levies. The Muscat Infantry was the only standard offensive force, but this was reliant on many Baluch soldiers, and its equipment was very poor. All of these units were commanded by British Loan Service Officers, with Omani officers not allowed above the rank of lieutenant, and these very much in support roles, such as the transport officer. The first major change took place in 1955 with the formation of the Headquarters of the Muscat and Oman Armed Forces, which included a naval patrol and Muscat Garrison. The forces however remained at this point largely independent of one another.

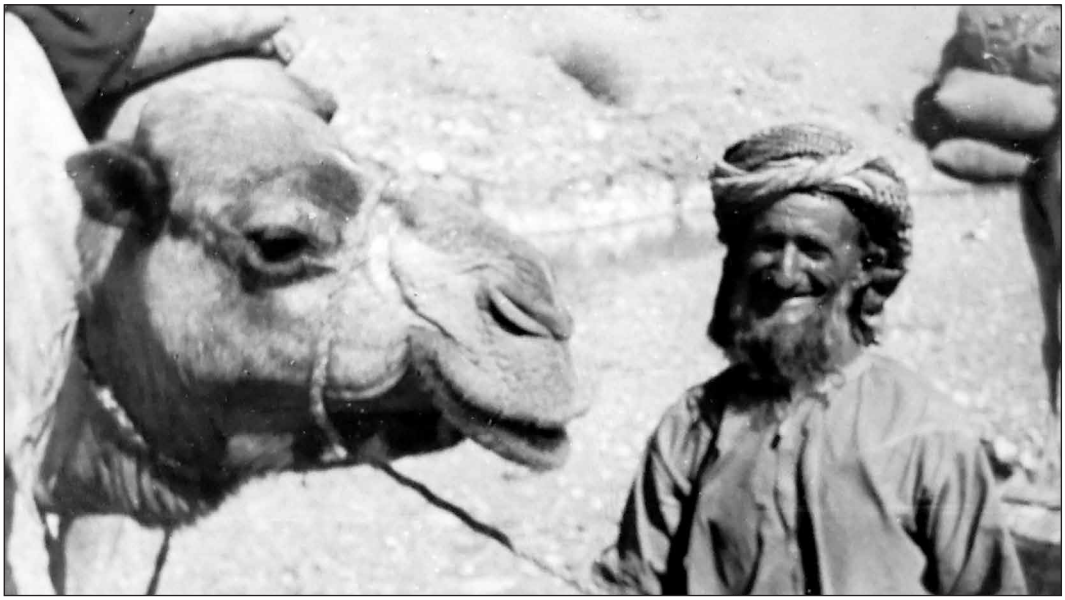
The development of the Sultan's Armed Forces started to a more significant extent after the 1955 occupation of the interior. The Muscat and Oman Field Force, previously a levy, was formed into the Oman Regiment, and structured on the British model of a three-company battalion. The Batinah Force, based on the Batinah coast, was renamed the Northern Frontier Regiment, linking it to its garrison location on the northern frontier of Oman, and again structured into a three-company battalion. Finally, the Muscat Infantry, the strongest of the forces, was designated the Muscat Regiment. Each was commanded by a British Loan Service Lieutenant Colonel, with companies commanded by Majors, largely Contract Officers. Although this structural change was made, the reality was that in the spring of 1957 the units were not fully formed and had not yet been fully equipped along the lines of the new structure. This explains to some extent their extremely poor performance during the Nizwa offensive of 1957.

After the defeat of the Oman Regiment, and the subsequent direct British involvement in the Nizwa offensive of 1957, further developments took place, mainly as part of the 1958 defence agreement with the UK. The purpose of this agreement was to 'extend assistance towards strengthening of [The Sultan's] Army'.[1] This treaty allowed for the provision of regular officers on secondment to the Sultan's Armed Forces in addition to those who were on contract, who were seen by some to be 'over the hill'. It also provisioned for the growth in training facilities and the establishment of an air force. In return, the UK would get basing rights at Masirah and Salalah airfields. The command of the Sultan's military was given to a British officer, initially Colonel David Smiley,[2] which allowed greater professionalism and command and control of all resources for the campaign.

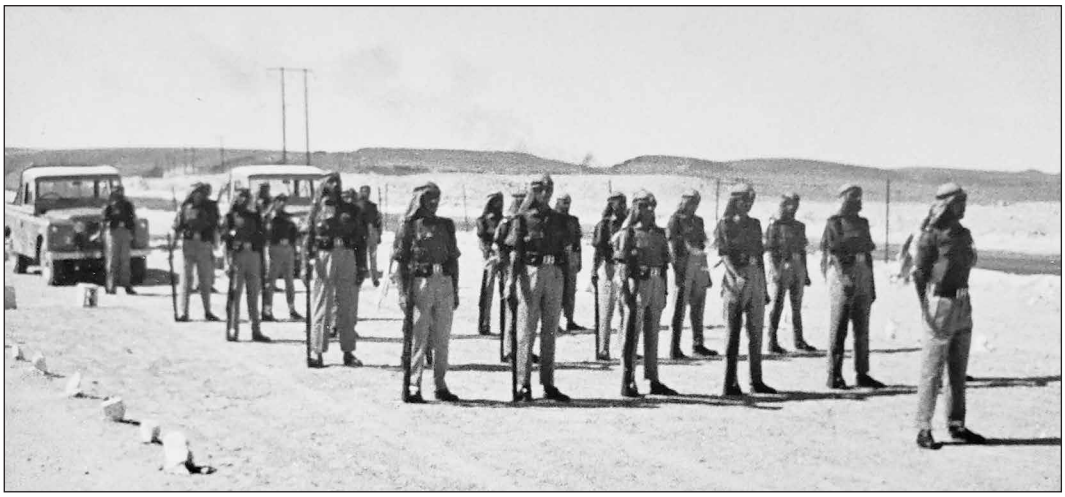
In 1958 the organisation was renamed the Sultan's Armed Forces, which now consisted of two greatly reinforced infantry battalions, the Northern Frontier Regiment and the Muscat Regiment. Some independent units existed, including the Coastal Patrol which was small in scale, the Muscat Garrison which was largely ceremonial and the Salalah Force, which guarded the Sultan's palace in Salalah and by its geographic separation, maintained its independence. There was an increase in the number of seconded Loan Service Officers from the UK, who saw the posting as an opportunity for adventure away from what was becoming a career with the Army of the Rhine.

The use of Baluch soldiers, from Baluchistan, was traditional in both Oman and Muscat. The now-Pakistani province of Baluchistan was once part of a greater Omani empire, and although not on a cultural equality with the Omani Arabs, the Baluchi soldiers were seen as both loyal and hardworking to the Omanis. The Baluchis were also used for specialist jobs, such as signallers, where their additional education in British India, allowed them

Baluch soldiers conducting signals training. The Baluchis were used in this role as they were generally more educated than the local Omanis, although considered inferior in terms of their tribal affiliations. (Christopher Hinton collection)



A typical Omani with a camel, 1964. (Andy Shepherd Collection)



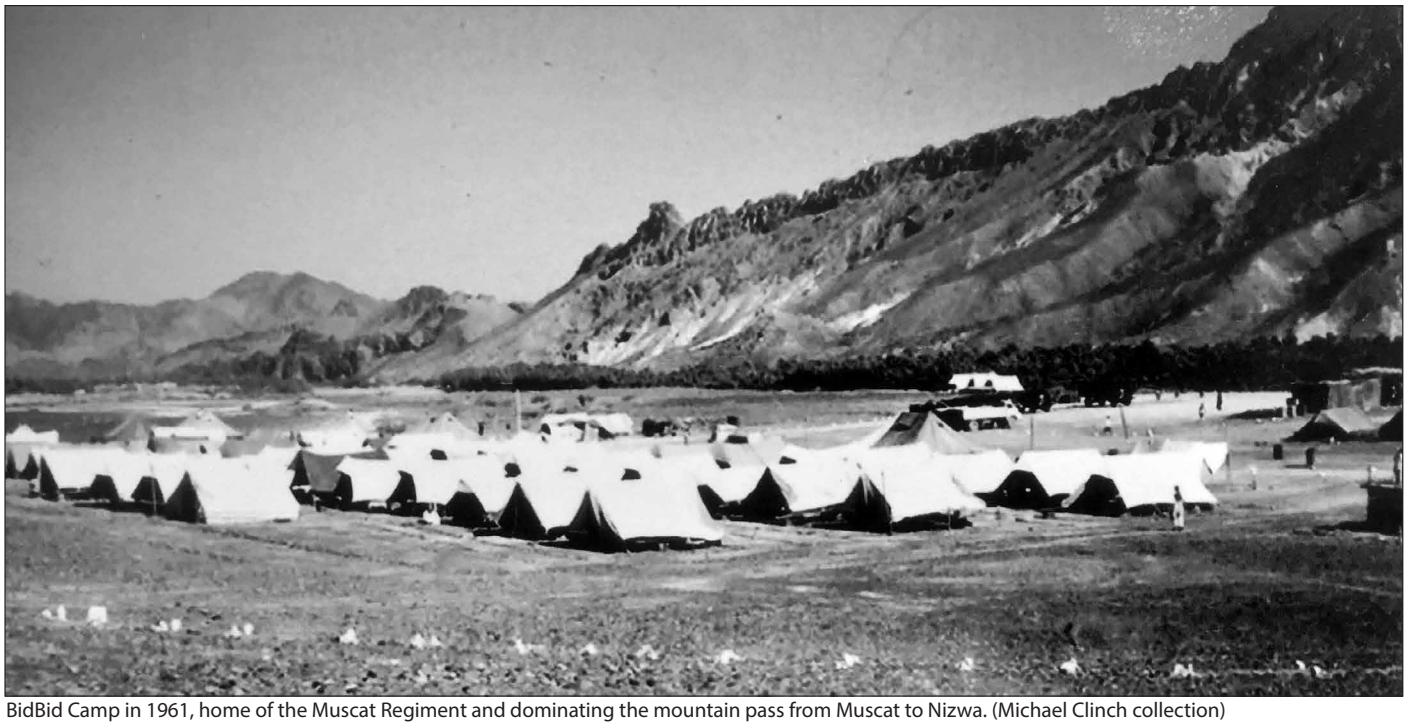
Oman Gendarmerie undergoing drill in 1964. (Andy Shepherd Collection)

to be easily trained in these roles. The use of heavy HF Skywave sets using Morse code, meant there was an increasing reliance on the Baluchi soldiers to conduct these roles.[3] Some units, such as the Northern Frontier Regiment, were largely Baluch manned but as the Sultan saw opportunities to allow jobs for the native population this would change.

Within the Muscat Regiment there were normally five seconded British officers and a number of Contract Officers, mostly ex-Indian Army. The Muscat Regiment had three companies – one Arab and two Baluch – with the Arabs mainly recruited from the Batina coastline. The equipment in 1960 was very basic, with only .303" Enfield rifles and Bren Guns. Communications were by the old 19 Wireless Sets, which were very heavy, and there were only two 3-ton Bedford Lorries and a number of Land Rovers. Wounded soldiers were formed into a special guard company to guard the Sultan's Palace in Muscat.[4]

With the disbandment of the Oman Regiment, there was a need to raise a third infantry battalion in the Sultan's Armed Forces. In June 1959, the Oman Gendarmerie was formed, initially part of the Sultan's Armed Forces but with an aim to be a paramilitary part of the Omani Police Force. This idea to allow additional policing came from the colonial policing view of the Contract Officers, many of whom had served across the British Empire and saw the utility in such forces. This regiment was in addition to the newly formed Criminal Investigation Department (CID) that would help with intelligence on suspected rebels. Much more than conventional offensive action, the Commanding Officer of 22 SAS noted that 'Success will be dependent on starting quickly and setting up an efficient system of collecting information'.[5] The formation of the CID and Oman Gendarmerie was significant in creating this system and gaining intelligence of future rebel activities. All officers within the Oman Gendarmerie were Contract Officers, many of whom had experience with 'native' troops.

By 1964 the Omani Gendarmerie were staffed with Contract Officers, who would remain in the country for a significant period and therefore build up knowledge of the population. An



BidBid Camp in 1961, home of the Muscat Regiment and dominating the mountain pass from Muscat to Nizwa. (Michael Clinch collection)

example of the type of Contract Officer attracted to this new force was Andy Shepherd who became a General Intelligence Officer with the Oman Gendarmerie and had previously served with the British South Africa Police in Rhodesia and was recruited by F.W. Bird MBE, another Contract Officer.[6] Other officers were from the Palestine Police, the Gurkhas, Tanganyika and other colonial postings. Most of the soldiers were Baluchis and therefore did not take sides between the various disputes which went on. The equipment was poor, most only having Lee-Enfield rifles from the Second World War. Much of the work done was around mediation between tribes at this point, particularly when the regular units had to start moving to Salalah due to the trouble building there.[7]

The wider police development did not take place until 1974, however, the embryonic creation took place through the development of a Criminal Investigations Department, as part of the Gendarmerie. This was the start of a wider development which would lead the establishment of a formal Police Force in 1974. Creation of a policing force showed that consideration was being made by the Sultan and his advisors on how to deal with the remaining rebels. An intelligence focused strategy, supported by Omani forces providing security, would enable a long-term process of defeating the rebellion. This emphasis on intelligence would pay dividends in the Dhufar War and can be argued to be one of the important factors in providing long-term stability in Northern Oman. The intelligence reports of the Oman Gendarmerie went to Land Forces Persian Gulf first and were recirculated back to Oman, much to the chagrin of the Sultan's Armed Forces who seemed to think that they should get them first.[8] This shows the considerable British influence across all aspects of the military.

The financial support given to the Sultan's Armed Forces was considerable during the years post the 1958 agreement; the priorities of expenditure can shed light on the methods used by the Sultan to secure the loyalty of his armed forces. As well as routine costs for the running of the army (670,250 Rials) and air force (26,600 Rials), a significant amount was set aside for capital expenditure on infrastructure building for the armed forces (698,000 Rials) in 1960.[9] It is notable that the Sultan himself corresponded over such amounts, whereas he did not mention the priority of civilian development projects at all. A significant amount of expenditure for the SAF development was for housing for troops, defences for the barracks and medical support.[10] It seems the priority for expenditure was to secure the loyalty of his army by ensuring they were correctly administrated and accommodated. This would ensure loyalty and build a nationalist agenda that would address long-term divisions.

The Northern Frontier Regiment and Muscat Regiment found themselves taking part in the February 1958 Plan, laying siege to Jebel Akhdar. Their confidence had been very much boosted by their successful attacks on Nizwa with the British forces flown in to defeat the Iman. However, the year-long siege took its toll on the organisation, with constant patrols and small actions leading to low morale in some units. That said, the new structures and better command, along with new equipment and weapons led to these two regiments improving in quality. The presence of the Royal Air Force in support of their operations, also boosted the morale of the soldiers.

The number of officers within the Sultan's Armed Forces steadily increased through 1958 and by the time of the Jebel Akhdar assault, 21 Royal Marines served within the Northern Frontier Regiment, down to platoon level. With the arrival of the SAS, this allowed integration into the battle group which would assault Jebel Akhdar, this proved very successful in the assault itself. To generate mass the Sultan's Armed Forces were still reliant on local levies, as shown by the two ineffective forces raised to isolate the mountain during the assault. However, the quality of the two new regiments had been proved and this led to this structure being adopted as the Sultan's Armed Forces expanded into the next decades.

With the withdrawal of British forces, the insurgency did not come to an end. Force was still used after the Jebel Akhdar operation, with punitive raids against outlying villages when required. The two main regiments of the SAF were divided to provide active patrols across the interior, with the Muscat Regiment in the south with its headquarters at Iski and the Northern Frontier Regiment in the North based from Nizwa, but also dominating Jebel Akhdar itself,[11] with one company remaining on top of the Jebel

Buraimi Omani Gendarmerie post. Of the nine villages splitting the oasis, six belong to Abu Dhabi and three to the Sultanate. (Christopher Hinton Collection)

Omayar bin Khamis, Talib's former mortar officer, now working with the Sultan's Armed Forces. This irrigation system was repaired at the village of Sharaijah. (Christopher Hinton Collection)

to occupy a proposed fort in Saiq.[12] In addition, the Oman Gendarmerie was growing in size and adding additional intelligence gathering resources, particularly along the Batinah coastline.

Resistance on the Jebel itself was very much limited as many of the villages had been destroyed and with the destruction of their falaj systems, irrigation was almost impossible.[13] The development of indigenous forces within Oman that were able to conduct patrols and offensive operations without British support removed, to some extent, the underlying disquiet with regards to British forces being utilised. It allowed the Sultan to police his own country and provided employment for loyal tribes, bringing some unity to the interior and therefore dealing with the long-term causes of the rebellion. There was an active policy of recruiting former rebels into the Sultan's Armed Forces,[14] as well as a policy of forgiveness and reconciliation. Not four years after the Jebel Akhdar assault, Omayar bin Khamis, Talib's former mortar officer, was working as a Wali in his village and actively supporting the Sultan, in direct contact with the SAF.[15]

Now with three regiments, although one a paramilitary police unit and two additional independent units, the newly named Sultan's Armed Forces were structured much more like a British brigade. They were operating in a much more coordinated way and utilised a greater number of seconded officers on both Loan Service and contracts, to build up this force. The motivation of those who travelled to Oman as Loan Service varied. In late 1962 the then-Major Christopher Hinter was informed after Staff College, that he was posted to Muscat and Oman as the GSO2 (General Staff Officer Class 2) Intelligence for the Headquarters of the Sultan's Armed Forces. He did not even know where the country was and received no Arabic training. His job was to gather intelligence for the British authorities and to give 'filtered' information to the Sultan himself.[16] On arrival in the country he lived in the Officers Mess at Bait al Falaj. His office itself was spartan and 'you either had the fan on and your papers blew everywhere, or you didn't and sweated all over your papers'.[17] The humidity was particularly great on the coast, although when travelling inland it was cooler in the Jebel and there was a drier heat on the Saudi border. As an experience, like many of those who served in Oman over this time, Major Hinter found the experience fascinating, and the country extraordinary.

As the GSO2, Major Hinter had to gather intelligence about the factions which even after the defeat of Talib on Jebel Akhdar were mining the roads inland. It took him a number of months to understand the tribal affiliations, especially the reasons behind the Beni Hini and Beni Rhian supporting Talib and the religious differences that underpinned these differences.[18] In the headquarters itself the British Loan Service staff who rotated every two years back to their normal postings in the UK were working

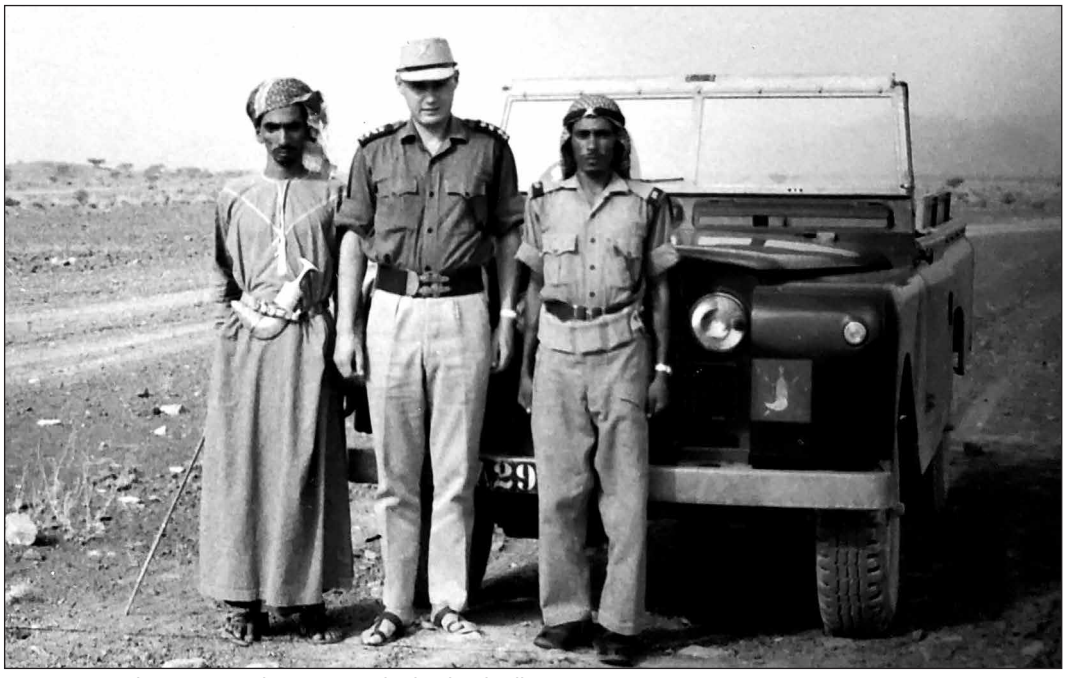
alongside those British officers who decided to staff on 'Contract', many who were 'old Arab hands' who had served in the area even during the Second World War. There were a number of Omanis in the headquarters, but at this point mainly in low paid roles, such a orderlies and the like. Major Hinter remembered fondly his Baluchi orderly Mohammed.[19]

The key to intelligence gathering was the use of the Desert Intelligence Officers (DIOs), who were British captains who had excellent Arabic and travelled the interior gathering information which could then be analysed at the Headquarters. Major Hinter met with the DIOs twice a month, often using a Beaver aircraft of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force to travel to a remote landing strip in the interior of the country. The two key DIOs who worked for Major Hinter in 1964 were Captain Bill Peter and Captain Malcome Dennison. The information that these officers brought back often clashed, therefore the Intelligence Section in the Headquarters had to make an assessment on the reliability of each set of information, and what was likely to be true or not. This monthly intelligence assessment was sent back to the Foreign Office in Bahrain and a version to the Sultan himself, edited to ensure that informants were not given away accidently.[20]

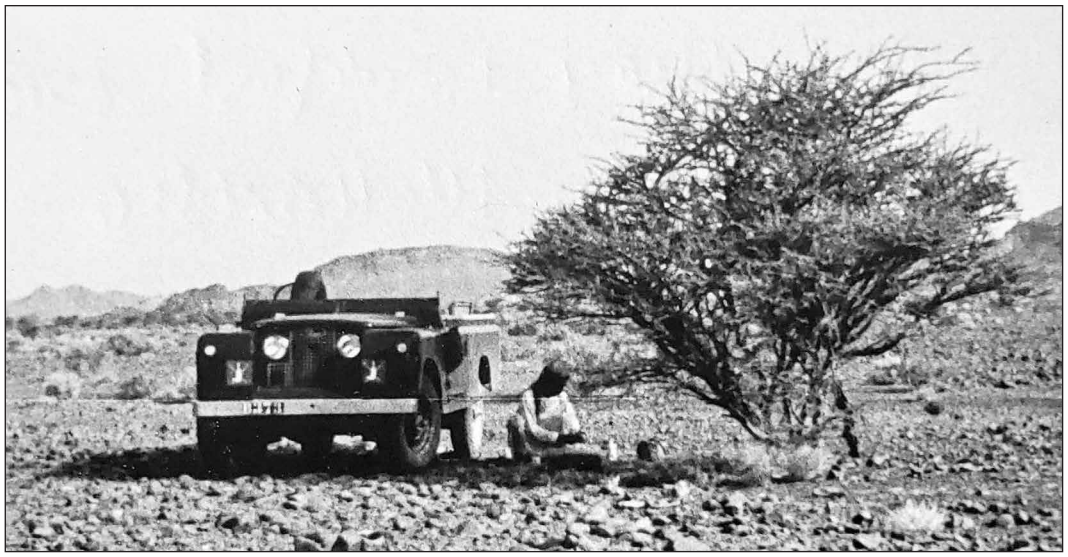
Despite the increased presence of the two regiments inland, and the greater use of intelligence for targeted operations, the insurgency continued. The chosen method of attack by the insurgents was the landmine. Often these were improvised, using wooden boards buried in the gravel roads, and using electric current to set off the charge.[21] A significant proportion of these land mines

'Hearts and Minds'; SAF Intelligence Officers collecting wood for local tribesmen. (Christopher Hinton Collection)

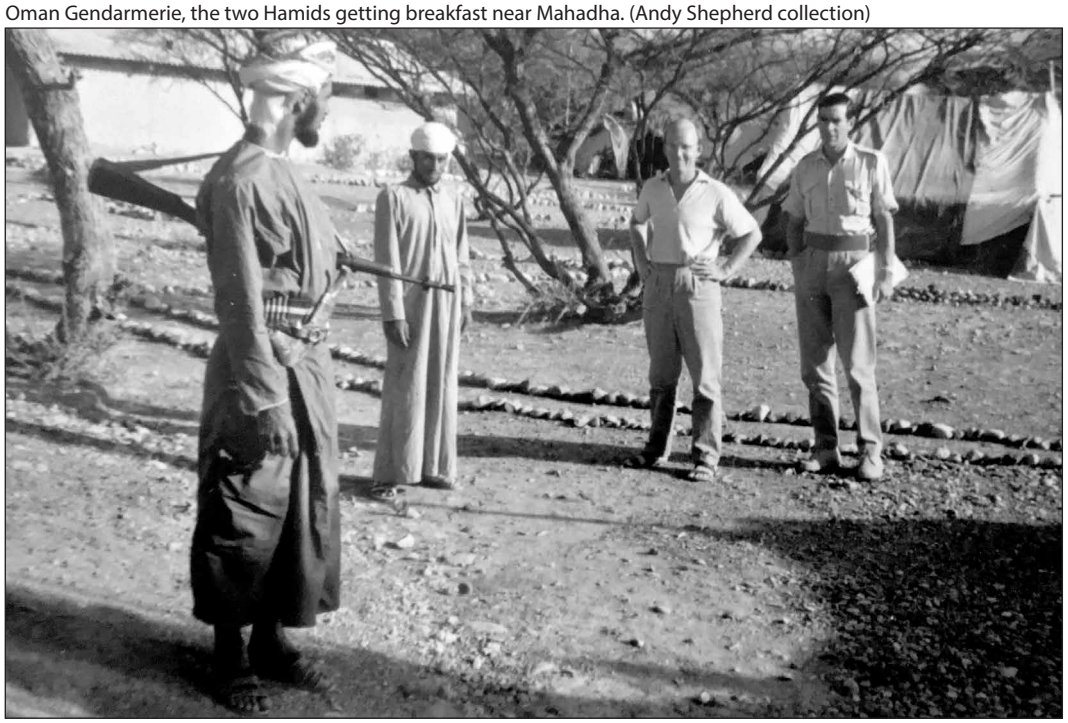
The Desert Intelligence Officers' house. Left to right, Nasser bin Ali, Bill Peat, Multi Shaikh, Col Le Feuvre, Christopher Hinton, Martin Randall and two men from Iski. (Christopher Hinton collection)



An Oman Gendarmerie patrol in 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)



Oman Gendarmerie, the two Hamids getting breakfast near Mahadha. (Andy Shepherd collection)



Khamis bin Ali and Ian Shepherd, the head of the Desert Information Officers, in civilian clothing. (Christopher Hinton collection)

used were from the Abu Sultan ammunition dump in Egypt that had been handed over to the Egyptians in 1954. However, when Nassar took over Egypt he distributed many of these mines to terrorists across the Middle East.[22] A very simple plan was devised to stop the campaign of mining, which Major Hinter credits for victory in the campaign. Locals were offered money for any mines that were handed into the SAF; 'a bag of Rhials'[23] was the going rate.

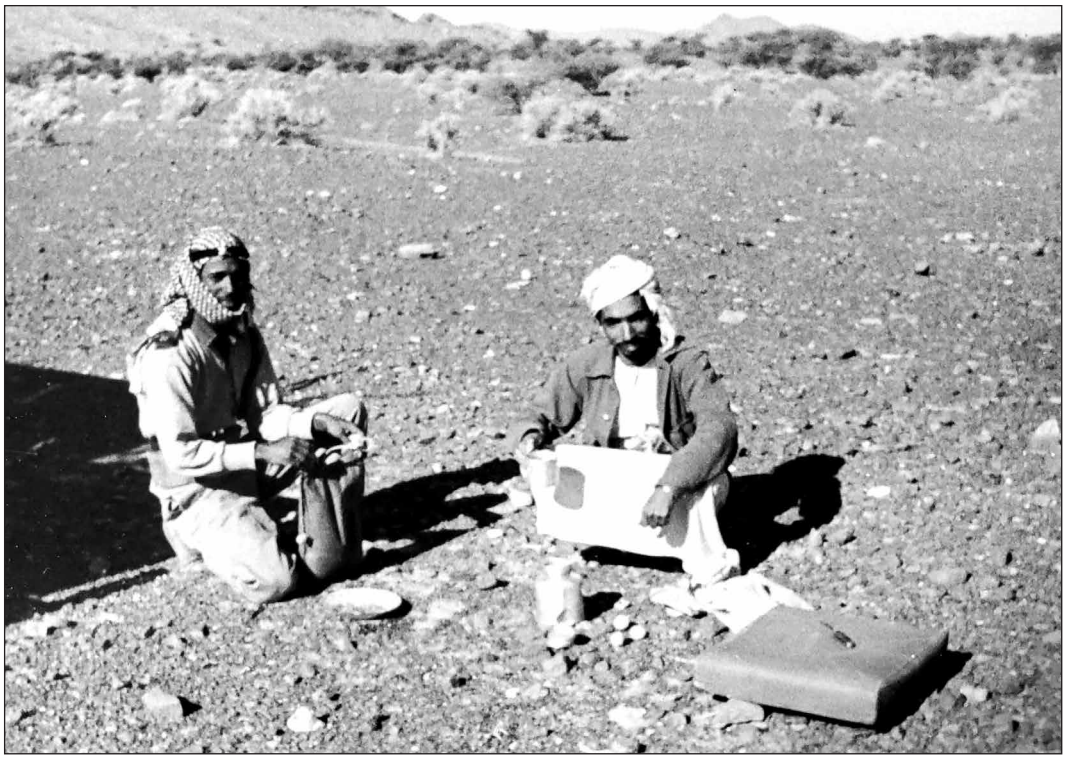
> I went to Nizwa and saw the Wali. I couldn't sit down with my legs crossed and was eating the usual roast goat. I received a tap on the shoulder and a man said to me in hushed tones; "Someone wants to speak to you Sir." I was slightly concerned and checked that this was not someone who wanted to shoot me, but was assured it was safe. A funny scruffy man with a musket taller than him was in the shadows. He stated, "I have something for you… but it is not mine! My brother found it by a bush!" I asked him where he found it and he said "'He accidently found it." The man got his bag of Rhials and we got a British Mark 7 anti-tank mine.[24]

The intelligence gathered the SAF Intelligence Cell and the DIOs led to patrols from the Muscat Regiment and Northern Frontier Regiment being tasked to move to locations where arms were being moved into the country. The Saudi border was particularly porous, as it was not clearly defined on the ground, except in the region of Buraimi. The SAF Intelligence Cell picked up information regarding the movement of terrorists coming over the border from Yemen in the south; in 1964 a series of assassinations were starting around Salalah which would develop into a further war against the Sultan.[25] The Sultan was too heavy handed, too autocratic and this was to be his downfall in the end. Even his Contract Officers, who often advertised themselves in public to be loyal, were only to a point.[26] That said, the coordination of ground troops, supported by intelligence gathering and precision operations, often integrated with the Oman Gendarmerie, produced results which over time reduced the insurgency in the north of Oman.

The establishment of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force took place in 1959 as part of the British grant to improve the armed forces. The growth of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force allowed air patrols along the border, increasing the deterrence in the areas where insurgents were moving supplies and ammunition into the country. By 1962 the Commander Sultan of Oman's Air Force had a full squadron with support staff under his command. The SOAF at this point consisted of nine Officer Pilots, in addition to an Admin Officer, all of which were seconded from the Royal Air Force. Also on strength was a Pakistani NCO and the only Omani, a civilian radio operator, who was responsible for the HF radio link to the Sultan's palace in Salalah.[27] The ground crews and air work services were all civilian contractors, mainly from British companies. They were technical experts running the air force and at this point numbered only 20 engineers. The underdevelopment of Oman at this point meant that there were simply no technical schools, or money to send people abroad. Therefore, opportunities for employment for the local Omanis were very limited. The purpose of the SOAF was different to the consolidation provided

by the army, focused more on the operational and strategic impact of the air force itself.

The first aircraft in the squadron were two Scottish Aviation Pioneers[28], however these were soon replaced by four de Havilland Canada Beaver (DHC-2 Beaver) single piston support planes. The Beaver was the workhorse of the SOAF, it allowed a single pilot to take six passengers or 2,100 pounds of stores across Oman. Journeys for supplies, meetings or reinforcement could now take place rapidly between units of the Sultan's Armed Forces, including flying to far flung outposts, such as those at Ibri. The versatility of the aircraft allowed landing on short strips and on rough terrain. Before the addition of these support aircraft, it took 12 hours to get to Nizwa, as there were no roads at all. The use of aircraft in such a way gave real cohesion to the country, following the amalgamation of the coastal areas of Muscat in the inland areas of Oman. In particular it supported the new garrison on the plateau of Jebel Akhdar, which otherwise would have had hugely exposed supply lines, easily ambushed.



Two Hamids of the Oman Gendarmerie having a breakfast near Mahadha. (Andy Shepherd Collection)

The second aircraft in the squadron's establishment was the Percival P.56 'Piston' Provost (T.52), known as the Piston Provost,[29] This aircraft could be armed with two .303" machine guns, 500lbs of bombs or rockets. The aircraft could be used for staffing runs and shows of force, posing a potent threat to any would be terrorists. Although there was limited use for this aircraft after the assault on Jebel Akhdar, its use against a particularly difficult village to provide a show of force, cannot be underestimated. The use of Royal Air Force aircraft during the occupation of the interior had been decisive, and the threat of such use again was a significant disincentive for any rebel-minded tribal leaders to act against the Sultan again. The memory of the bombing campaign lived long in the mind of the rebels.

Life in the Sultan of Oman's Air Force during the development stage in the 1960s was fun for those attached on Loan Service. The community was very close, with an Officers' Mess at Bait al Falaj, which was humming with the odd party. Many officers brought their families and the children were educated in a school run by the Squadron Leader's wife in a small bungalow next to the fort.[30] The officers lived in modern air-conditioned bungalows, which were of prefabricated construction and although stark, were very comfortable. All the barracks in the outstations were prefabricated and quality of life for soldiers and officers was infinitely better that that of the local population. For an officer who at this time had

A stop in the desert by the Northern Frontier Regiment, 1964. (Tony Calder Collection)

A Sultan of Oman's Air Force Beaver supply aircraft. (Christopher Hinton collection)

A row of piston-powered Provost ground attack aircraft of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force. (Christopher Hinton collection)

A British parachute drop; training with the SAF in 1964. (Christopher Hinton collection)

a choice of life in Germany, or at best Cyprus, Oman was an exotic posting, surrounded by the promise of adventure.

The routine of the squadron, when not tasked on supply and transport missions was based around training. The squadron flew many training exercises, although there was no flying on Fridays, every other day they flew across the country. 'Oman was from a visual view; down a Wadi, and up the Jebel Akhdar and such; fantastic for flying.'[31] Much of the training was designed to impress the natives and demonstrations took place in conjunction with the Omani Artillery: 'The artillery would go to the Haja Bowl outside Muscat, go out and put out a white sheet on the ground, then go back to their guns. The Provosts would do a sweep and check the area was clear and then the artillery would practise.'[32]

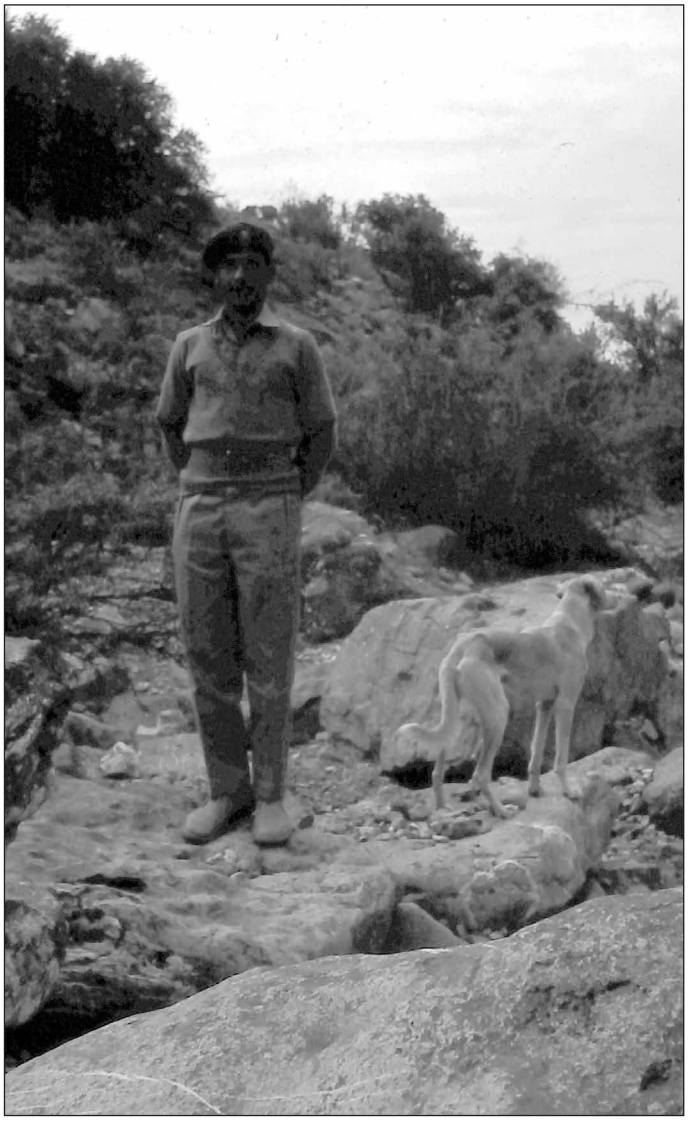
Headquarters Muscat Regiment at Bait al Falaj Fort. (Michael Clinch collection)

Training took place with various regiments practising procedures of landing by day and night and giving air support. There was also joint training with British units on exercise in Oman, including training in parachuting and parachuting supplies. Much of this designed to improve the capability of the Sultan's Armed Forces, but also to provide a deterrent to anyone who would consider supporting the rebels in open conflict.

There were some terrorist incidents that impacted on the Sultan of Oman's Air Force. The SOAF had small supplies of aircraft ammunition around the county under military guard, but sometimes they were also stored under the local Wali. An example of this was at Ras-al-Had, on the eastern point of Oman that stretches into the Indian Ocean. Here there was a supply of ammunition by a big lagoon, kept in a little hut by the Wali's fort. One night a 'terrorist' got into the hut and blew it up, but only partially. The Commander of the SOAF flew down a SAF Pakistani engineer, laid some charges and blew up the rest! Many of these incidents were less coordinated and more focused on the perceived foreign forces in the country. As time went on such incidents slowed down.[33]

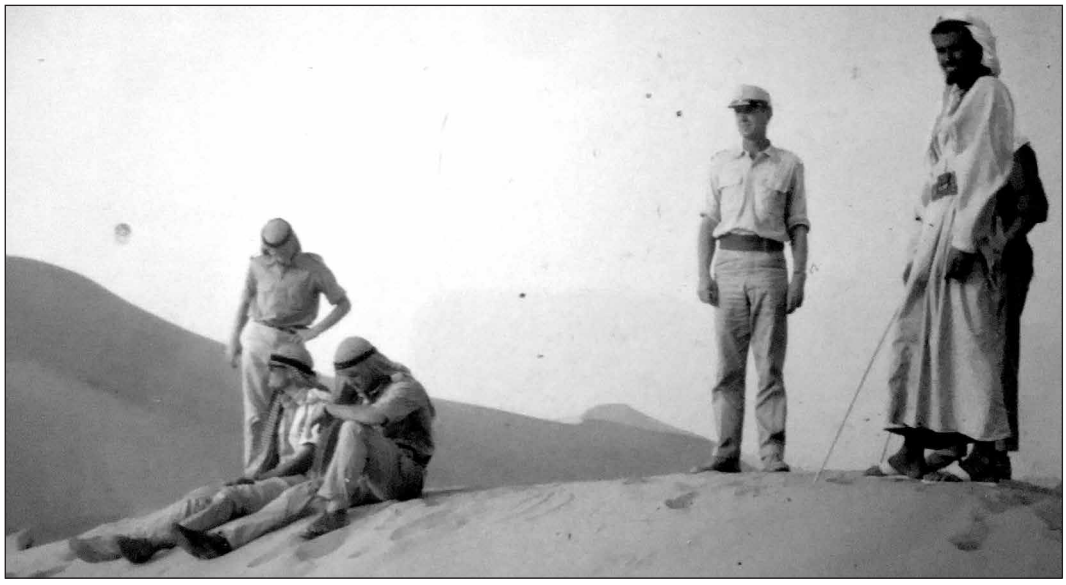
The development of the SOAF was considered a great piece of work by the Foreign Office, and in expanding such a crucial strategic asset, contradicted much of what they were doing in other areas of the empire, such as Aden. It showed great foresight, and by having a permanent air force in Oman, the RAF did not again have to fly in to support the Sultan. Politically this gave deniability of involvement for the British government and therefore allowed Oman to be supported indirectly and also for the long-term. The building of air strips also supported the ability of the RAF to forward mount aircraft and supplies, which are utilised to this day. It also gave much needed experience in desert conditions to RAF crews, who often were just based in Western Europe as the empire retracted.

Despite the modernisation of the Sultan's Armed Forces, loyalty was not entirely secured in the north, with the rebellion continuing even at a low level for the next decade. Punitive measures by the military had not stopped, and during a general strike called in Northern Oman in 1971, the Sultan gave orders to the military authorising the shooting of rioters.[34] This focus on punitive measures never really went away, and draconian prison sentences were often used on those who were captured at the lowest level. Fort Jalali in Muscat harbour was used for prisoners



Saluki, a soldier of the Northern Frontier Regiment, 1964. (Tony Calder collection)

Evening detail parade of C Coy NFR at Ibri Camp. The company is in mixed civilian dress. Note the Arab and Baluch mix. (Christopher Hinton collection)



Colonel Tony Lewis, Commander SAF, seen atop a dune in the Rub al Khali (The Empty Quarter). (Christopher Hinton collection)

well into the 1970s and stories persist of the treatment of those imprisoned in the fort, including those of the Royal Family who did not fully support the Sultan. There were over two hundred prisoners in the jail at any time and often many were manacled to the walls, as they had been for hundreds of years. Colonel Smiley called the fort 'a Hellhole'.

The distrust of Omani officers by the Sultan manifested itself with an increase in British Loan Service and Contract Officers. By 1979 there were over 300 British military personnel serving with the SAF despite attempts at Omanisation, where Omani officers were given key roles to remove the perceived influence of Britain.[35] Armed forces development was focused on maintaining loyalty to the Sultan through high wages and infrastructure development, which in many ways was successful. With five-sixths of expenditure on military development rather than civilian, the Sultan prioritised the subjugation of the population of the interior over its development. Civilian development funding in 1960 was only £232,000, less than a sixth of the overall expenditure.[36] However, this does not necessarily mean that the development measures were ineffective; civilian development measures often had an impact out of proportion to their allocated financial priority on long-term peace and stability in Northern Oman.

Despite all of the developments of the military over the period, the military campaign in Northern Oman was dominated from 1955 to 1961 by conventional action and patrolling tactics. Captain Michael Clinch[37] was Adjutant of the Muscat Regiment from November 1960 and based at Bait al Falaj. In mid-1961 his company relieved the NFR, where he commanded at Izki and later Saiq on the Jebel until August 1962. There was still rebel activity including mining of tracks & sniper fire at convoys. His company conducted constant patrols with occasional mines and snipers. Most of the time was spent patrolling through the villages to show the flag around the base of Jebel Akhdar. During these patrols the soldiers were fed well, having numerous *fuddles* with the locals. Captain Clinch commented that it was those high up in the Jebel who were still fighting, and it tailed off towards the end of 1962. He described his relations with the locals at Saiq as 'guardedly alright' but a lot more strained than those at the base of the Jebel. Nothing was done in terms of repairs to the villages. The company of the Muscat Regiment built a fort but gave no help to villagers.

The development of the SAF, although with some notable exceptions of the Oman Gendarmerie, was focused on obtaining a force that could have the same military effect that the British had produced for the Sultan during the three military operations of the late 1950s. The development of the Sultan's Armed Forces was successful in many ways, but there were financial limitations that reduced the extent to which it could be developed in the short-term. The force still only had two major units, which were reliant on both British leadership and often overseas, Baluchi, manpower. The units had limited expeditionary capacity, and

equipment was still in short supply. This lack of capability would lead to a demand for further British intervention a decade later in the Dhufar conflict. However, the developments in the north had considerable impact on suppression of any further rebellion. Many locals chose to have a son join the military, to have both a 'foot in both camps' but also to have a stable job, in the limited economic climate.

The lack of reconciliation in many respects continued in Northern Oman during the subsequent Dhufar conflict. During the Christmas 1972 plot the instigators were round up and jailed, this was followed by 'a shoot-out between a truck full of front members and an army checkpoint near Al Rustaq in mid-1974, which turned out to be the swan song of the movement'.[38] These repeated examples of violence can be used to cite a growing isolationism between those who supported the Sultan and were benefitting from the new development and those who were ideologically separate to him and could not be integrated. The failure of integration of the 1959 revolt leaders, as they pulled back to Iraq from Saudi Arabia, led to a spread of ideas further. Disaffected Dhufar tribesmen met with the exiled Imam Ghalib bin Ali and through him Saudis and Iraqis, who gave military training for the future campaign in Dhufar. In 1964 they returned to Dhufar by way of Saudi Arabia, being provided with arms, money and transport across the desert by the Saudi government.[39] To that end, although some attempts at integration were made, the failures of integration led to the escalation of conflict in later years.

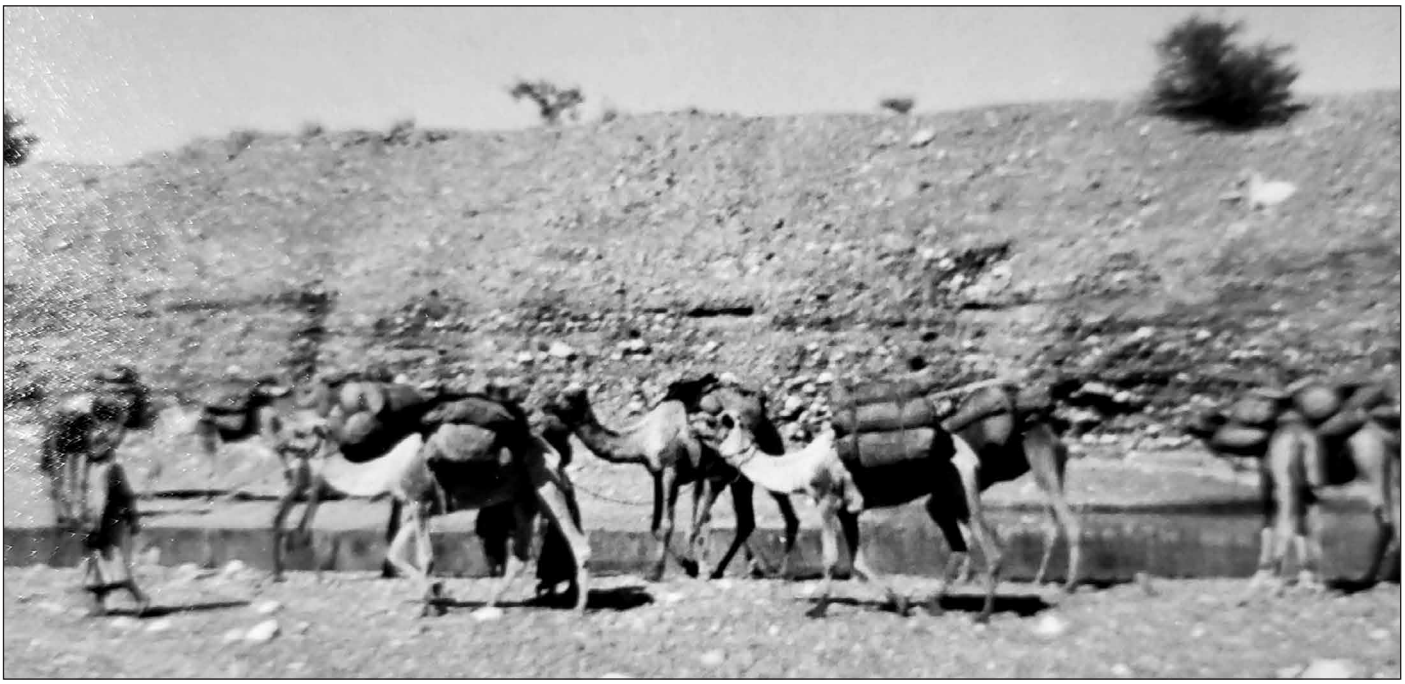
The low level of economic development in Oman prevented considerable long-term development. Sultan Sa'id did not wish to stretch his limited resources on projects he considered unsustainable. (Author's collection)

5
CIVILIAN CAPACITY BUILDING AND RECONCILIATION

During the period after the end of significant combat operations in Northern Oman and prior to the Dhofar War, it is widely stated that poverty in Northern Oman was widespread, and the government's civil affairs programmes rested more on promises of post-war reform and redistribution of wealth than any actual progress during the conflict.[1] However, this criticism does not reflect the humble beginnings in which development started or the considerable improvements that were made. Sultan Sa'id initiated development schemes in the last two years of his reign when he received the first oil revenue, this included more schools and office buildings, a few roads, a new seaport included in a 'Greater Matrah Plan'.[2] Despite these efforts, it is widely accepted that by the time of the coup in 1970 the country had little infrastructure, did not have a modern port, roads, schools and electricity outside the capital area.[3] However despite this, some progress had been made, and due to the humble beginnings of this development, the improvement seen by those who lived in the country would have been considerable.

The first steps towards a redevelopment programme were made in 1958 when the British diplomat Hugh Boustead was appointed by the Sultan as Secretary of Development of Oman. Appointing such a minister was a clear recognition that development was needed in the country by both the Sultan and the British. However, Boustead would later describe the position as intensely frustrating,[4] as the development he tried to produce was curtailed by both budgets and internal politics and priorities. This position was agreed upon through the agreement of 1958 with Britain and it can be argued that the 'subsequent programme of development carried out under Hugh Boustead's direction in the valleys and plateaux of the Jebel soon banished whatever traces of nostalgia may have lingered among the inhabitants for their brave days as *badmashes*'.[5] The development department started a string of ambitious education projects that would, it was hoped, help build a modern education system,[6] as well as the development of the transportation system, economy and health. The reality of what was achieved goes against the popular misconception of a total lack of development at all.

To understand the context of these development schemes, firstly an understanding must be made of the frustrations that Hugh Boustead described. From Boustead's perspective it was the reticence of the Sultan to spend money on civil development, and his preference to spend money on the development of the military. It is widely reported that Boustead as development minster and Smiley as military commander were both highly critical of the way the Sultan treated his people, described as 'neglecting their welfare to the point of abandonment'.[7] Often cited examples of this include when Boustead tried to persuade him to set up primary schools to educate the sons of tribal sheikhs and other dignitaries, the Sultan replied 'that is why you lost India because you educated people'.[8] This lack of support for his own people may however have been simply brought on by both the financial limitations of the non-existent economy and the requirement for the Sultan to consolidate his position in power. The reality of development was that the issues in Oman were not only of Sa'id bin Taimur's making, they were significantly exacerbated by a lack of income from the British government, who he was reliant on at this time,

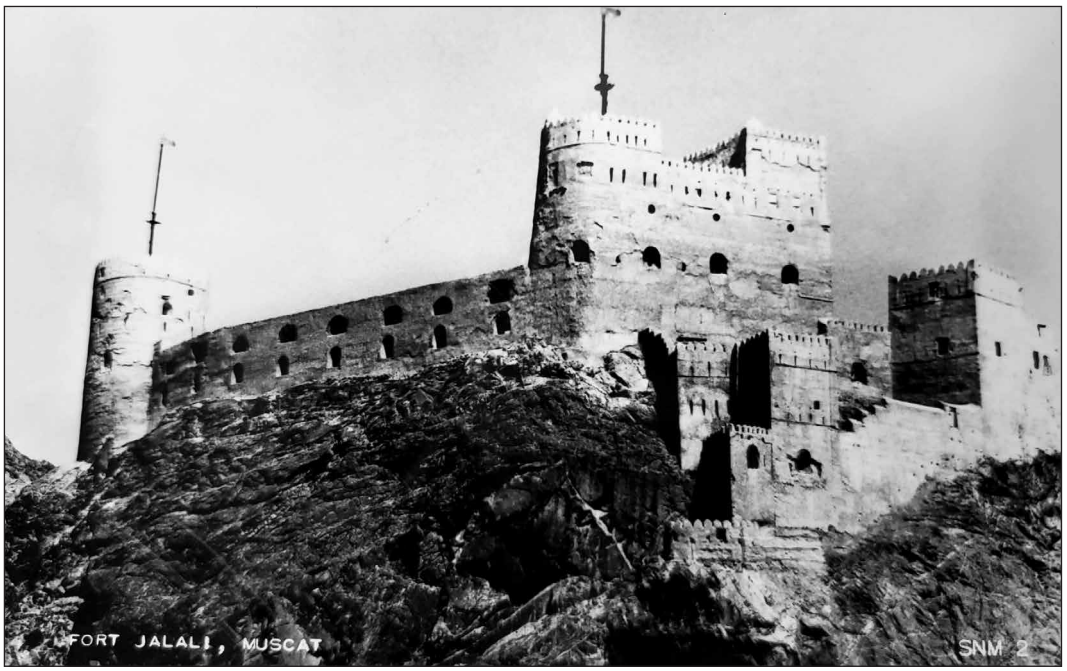


An Omani camel train in 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)

there was arguably a total abdication of responsibility in Southern Arabia[9] as Britain continued to pull back from empire.

The British linked inadequate progress in development to the Sultan's reticence, however financial limitations were also a factor. It is no coincidence that there was a rapid expansion in development when the oil income started in 1968, quadrupling to 211 million Riyals by 1974 allowing development by Sultan Qaboos.[10] Whitehall papers admit that Boustead was working on a 'shoe-string'[11] budget, this was one of the reasons he resigned in 1960. There was a perception through the 1960s that the influence of Britain within Oman was to the extent that it was a de facto colony. This influence included the placement of a considerable amount of British civilian staff as well as military. One of the best-known of these was Neil McLeod Innes who 'under the title of Minister of Foreign and External Affairs, claims to have acted as Sultan Sa'id's Military Secretary, Staff Officer, Liaison Officer, Political Officer, Passport Officer, Director of Medical Services and Secretary of Development'.[12] One of the most overt signs of British de facto rule was that Queen Elizabeth II's image was on postage stamps until 1966. With such clear authority, it was not a surprise that Sultan Sa'id started to step back from an active role in governing his country and became reliant upon British income and decision making.

Despite these two significant issues, there was development under Sultan Sa'id. The three key areas which had impact on the causes of instability were healthcare, the economy and education. These issues in the past were underlying causes of the poverty that led to conflict in Northern Oman, therefore dealing with these would reduce the root causes of instability. The success of these projects would have had a considerable impact on the loyalty and support given to the Sultan by the tribes of the interior as well as impact on the real lives of the people who lived there. Those which had tangible impacts, such as physical buildings, would be the most noticeable, and therefore would be prioritised amongst the work which was completed.



Jellali Fort, the prison used by the Sultan; a guard was provided from the Guard Company of the Sultan's Armed Forces. (Christopher Hinton collection)

In terms of healthcare, from humble beginnings where there was no health infrastructure within the interior, in less than three years there was a construction of 20 health centres and dispensaries. In addition, at the end of this three year period there was a travelling ambulance in the interior with a British Medical Officer in charge.[13]

Oman Gendarmerie patrol in 1964: in the foreground is Captain Hamid Bin Rashid. (Andy Shepherd collection)

Cross country driving over the challenging terrain of Oman. (Andy Shepherd collection)

The first action took place immediately after the end of the siege of Jebel Akhdar, with 1960 expenditure documents for the government of Oman show the appointment of a principal medical officer, the building of a 60-bed hospital in Muttrah and a 30-bed hospital in Nizwa, with an additional nine health centres, with eight other dispensaries as well as an anti-malarial unit.[14] These considerable successes would have a significant impact on a population which was described as having many diseases and being in feeble health at the time.[15] The clinics were a visible sign that the Sultan was bringing development to the interior and would have reduced opposition to his rule considerably. These building were built rapidly and provided real time improvement to the lives of the people in the areas. They were located in tribal centres, and linked to those tribal leaders who had shown, or needed to show loyalty to the Sultan.

Even with these successful projects, there was a constant debate over the financial provision, with the British Treasury ensuring that the Sultan was paying his share of expenditure.[16] In addition the proportion of expenditure in relation to other areas, such as the military, was very low. There was also a struggle to obtain the right number of staff for these new facilities, with little infrastructure and poor living conditions, it would only attract those who needed the money, or were very much adventurous. Those locations inland, with the particularly bad road infrastructure, were hard to find qualified people to run them.

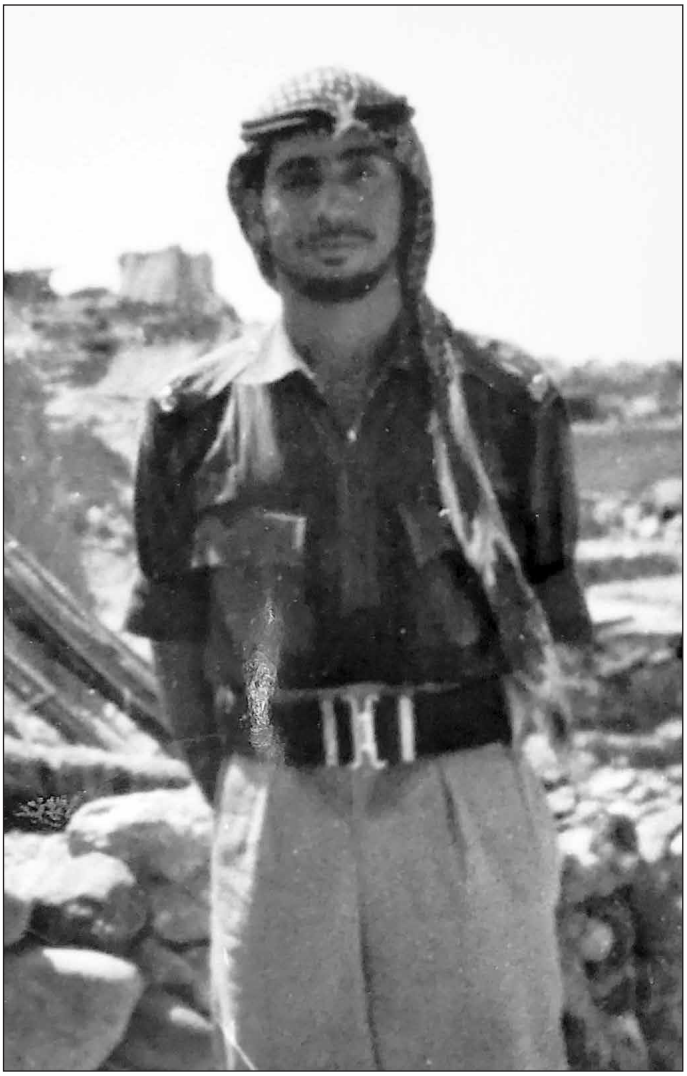
The rebels were aware that the developments in health were undermining their cause and decided to strike back at the facilities. Some raids were made by rebels on the health dispensaries, including one in Bahla being blown up.[17] These actions had the opposite impact on the rebel support, with the local population wanting these resources, it turned many against the rebel cause, and further undermined their position in the interior. The provision of health centres by the department of development is arguably one of the most significant measures in dealing with then long-term causes of conflict in Northern Oman. The reduction in easily cured diseases and the rapid impact these measures had, increased the popularity of the Sultan considerably in the north.

The improvements made to the economy in Oman were largely driven by the activity from the Oil Company, with increasing exploration taking place in the interior; 'There was great but largely unseen development in progress during my period in Oman and this was the search and discovery of oil. PDO always denied their progress but the flaring wells to the west of Nizwa suggested otherwise.'[18]

The economic development strategy in Northern Oman, from the government itself was based around increasing economic output, however, this was also influenced considerably by the British desire to export goods from Oman in order to reinforce their economy further and decrease the economic reliance on Britain. At the start of 1960, financial reports show a reliance of the country on date exports to India, with the only other significant export being fish, meaning that there was no diversity at all in the economy at this point.[19] A failure in the date crop, would lead to an economic disaster, therefore there was an immediate focus on being able to diversify the economy as well as increasing output.

In order to expand the economy, significant infrastructure development was started, this included an immediate increase in road laying, with an additional 125 miles of roads completed by 1961.[20] These development programmes included the expansion of fisheries and the development of port facilities with the arrival

Omanis in traditional dress, 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)



Sergeant Major Juma, Oman Gendarmerie, in his village of Kitna. (Andy Shepherd collection)

of a six-ton crane in 1961. Efforts were also made to persuade the Anglo-Kuwaiti fishing company to build a factory at Khor Fakhan.[21] Agricultural development was started with the building of an experimental farm at Nizwa and then Sohar, bringing in pumps and turning wasteland to agriculture. It was stated in dispatches 'the record of the Nizwa farm in 1961 has been the brightest part of the civilian development programme'.[22] Nizwa was the heart of the insurgency before 1959; the use of Nizwa for the first stages of economic development was not a coincidence. Water pumps were a focus in the interior, as well as the development of agricultural irrigation, in the form of falaj repair at Jebel Akhdar, immediately after the 1959 assault.[23]

Additional development programmes included the Sur Water Scheme completed by 1960, the Muscat Power House Completed by 1962,[24] as well as in 1962 plans for a second power station and a water scheme in Sur.[25] These economic development projects created work for locals, at first only in low paid roles, as the education and expertise was simply non-existent at this time. There was also an increase in trade, with foreign workers and more local purchasing of good, which over time created an increase in the standard of living. The building of these schemes in areas where there was conflict before had lasting influence on the tribal sheikhs who became more and more loyal to the Sultan where they gained wealth and power.

However, there were some issues with economic development, the priority of infrastructure was still focused on the military, with the majority of expenditure going on capital military projects. It is noticeable that the first road project, the concreting of the road between the airport and Mutrah and the SAF HQ was for military purposes but paid for through the development budget.[26] Much like in the Dhufar conflict, the priority was on military expenditure; in 1975 defence was still 44 percent of the budget.[27] That said, despite this improvement, the progress was slow: Squadron Leader John Horrell commented that there was very little development visible.

> During my time the roads were improved but this was mostly merely grading existing tracks without any durable surfacing. The barracks and military housing were all of recent construction. The airfields were all natural surfaces except an improvement was made by laying concrete in the touchdown area at the northern end of the Bait al Falaj runway.[28]

This focus on military projects did create jobs for the local population, but also meant that wide-ranging improvements were not the focus of the development.

There was also corruption, with road construction workers paying the local sheikhs up to two-thirds of their salary.[29] This corruption was in many ways not seen as an issue in local communities, but an extension of the Sheiks authority in their local area continuing under these new investments. In addition, there was a clear focus on providing British imports, with the direct influence of Britain though the seconded ministers and their masters back in London. Economic reports in this period comment on the rapid increase in exports from Britain to Oman during the period post-1959, showing a two-fold increase in the first three years, not including military imports.[30] If military imports were taken into account, the increase would be considerably more.

Despite these areas of corruption, the secondary economy, on the back of military construction and the Oil Company's exploration did create trade and associated jobs. The local purchase of goods by the Oil Company became more and more significant through the 1960s, increasing development and wealth in the interior where much of the oil exploration was taking place.[31] The demand for imported cement from India, an increase to 6,000 tonnes in 1961, shows the scale of the development projects.[32] The development of the economy was significant considering its humble beginnings. It could be argued that '1970 was a watershed in Omani development strategy which began much earlier'.[33] It was the expansion of the oil economy that allowed progress at a more rapid rate post its discovery in 1968. Development expanded in the 1970s and 80s with two five-year plans. These advocated cautious economic development and a diversification of the economy to include fisheries, crops, dates and copper, to replace Oman's reliance on oil, which in 1975 made up 96 percent of foreign earnings.[34] This diversification had its humble beginnings in the economic strategy of Sultan Sa'id. Like then, it had considerable influence on the loyalty of local tribes to the Sultan, and dealt with the underlying cause of conflict, removing the continuing support for the Imam.

One of the most controversial areas, which showed only limited development in the decade after the conflict, was that of education. The Sultan's view was that education could lead to further rebellion, though despite this he was persuaded through British influence to build the first schools in Muscat in 1940

"Sand recovery team". (Andy Shepherd collection)

De Havilland Beaver, Sultans Air Force. (Andy Shepherd collection)

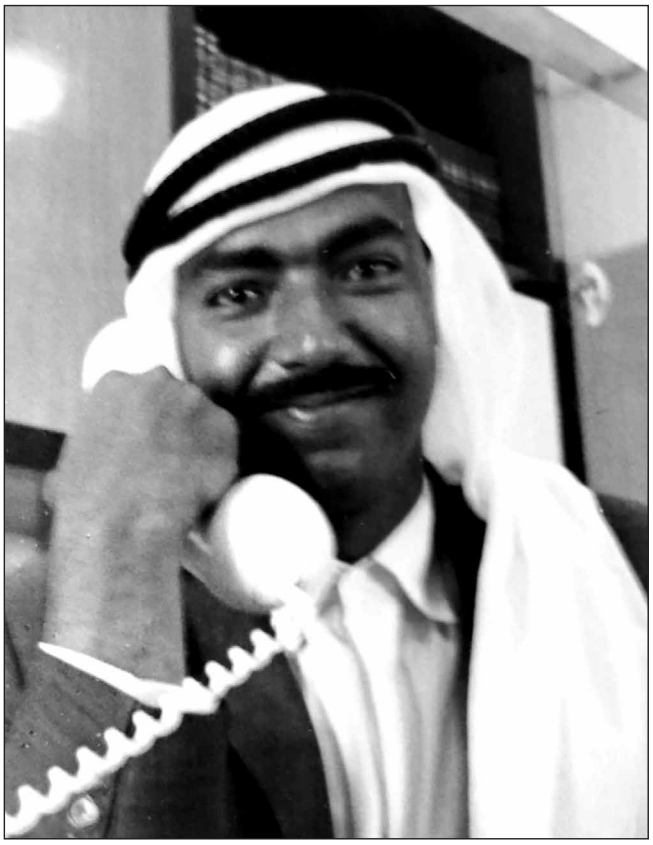
and Mutrah in 1948. The children were selected through tribal influence and to show British influence the medium of instruction was Arabic although the study of English as a foreign language was required.[35] There are two views of the reasoning for Britain's insistence on an expansion of education; the Western view is one of modernisation and preventing future rebellion. The Arabist view is that, as with British India, the idea was to 'create a middle class to act as intermediaries between foreign masters and local populous'.[36] Either way, the Sultan was very much against all but his tribal leaders' children being educated, and this was reflected by the very slow speed of development in this area.

Only two schools existed in the 1960s and these were largely for the royal family and those Sheiks which supported the Sultan. A third school was not opened until 1970 as part of the development programme, and the standard of these schools was abysmal, 'the school building appeared almost derelict, a place with cracked and broken windows covered with a thick layer of dust'.[37] It is noticeable that as the oil wealth increased and reliance on Britain decreased, Arabic was taught as the primary language and English as a foreign language, but in real terms these changes did not occur at scale until after the Sultan was disposed.[38] A further school for girls was under construction in Muscat by 1970, in addition to an American missionary school in Muscat that the Sultan had allowed to operate. The lack of education had a secondary impact with getting foreign workers to travel to the country to take up roles in healthcare and construction. The Sultan did not waver from this policy and his British advisors were hugely frustrated by this. This view was advocated by Hugh Boustead who stated that he; 'was not sorry to say goodbye to Muscat and Oman, nor in the slightest surprised that in July 1970 the Sultan was deposed and replaced by his son'.[39]

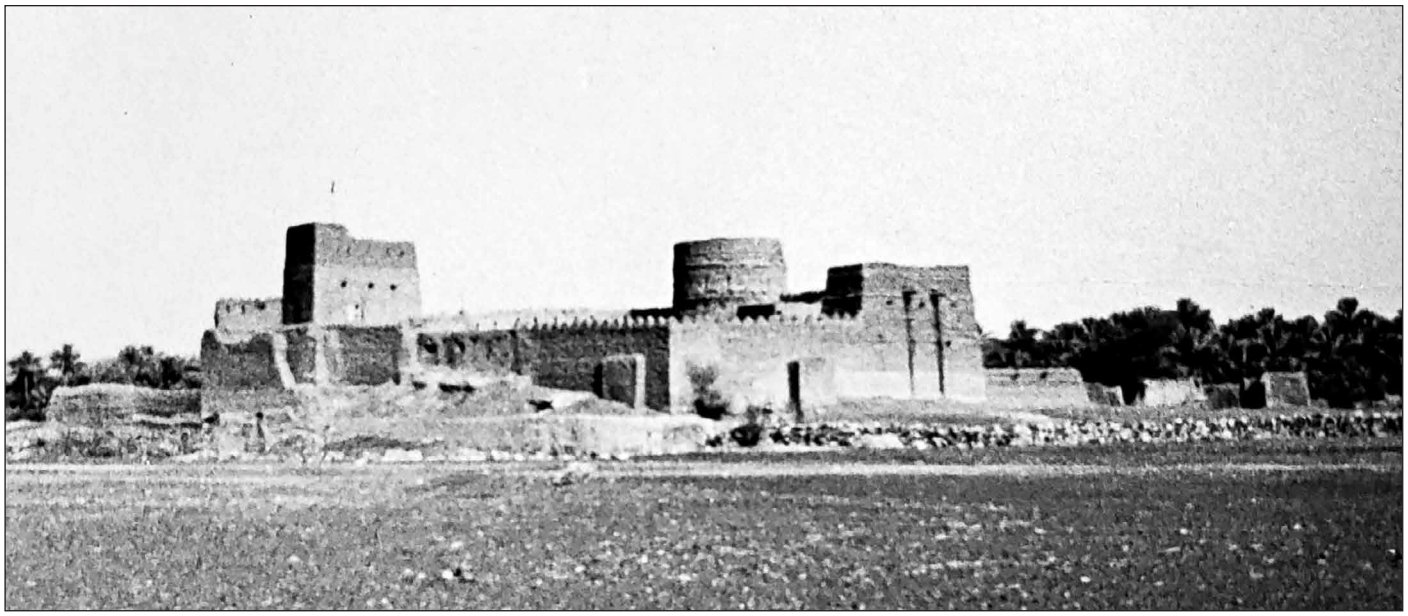
The building of other schools was planned by the development department, but was frustrated not only by Sultan Sa'id's reticence but also by the uprisings and rebellions occurring in various parts of the country, particularly now in the south.[40] By the end of the Sultan's reign in 1970 there were few Omanis with education, as a result of the country's poverty and the Sultan's deliberate policy against formal learning.[41] The failure to provide education facilities for his people, as a method of suppressing his population, was short-term in its outlook and in all likelihood exacerbated future conflict. This was especially the case in Dhufar with rebel bases in Yemen setting up schools which were very popular; here for the first time the young children received primary education.[42] It is fortunate that the rebels in the north did not have the same capacity for hearts and minds operations post the assault on Jebel Akhdar, meaning that they could not exploit this policy by providing education of their own. However, the policy certainly drove many educated Omanis who worked overseas into the arms of the newly formed rebel movements in the south of Oman.

In addition to the economic improvements in some areas, and lack of improvement in others, the other area worthwhile of focus is the Sultan's work on reconciliation of his people. This reconciliation, as previously discussed, was kicked off in style, by his grand tour of the north of the country. However, post this tour, the lack of any significant reconciliation of the disaffected tribes within Oman post conflict has been highlighted as a precursor to the future conflict in Dhufar. In reality however, many actions took place behind closed doors, with the Sultan's relatives taking up key positions within the major towns and villages, increasing his influence. These tribal changes made an impact at the local level, and certainly paid a key part, combined with infrastructure

Private Bin Eid, Oman Gendarmerie, 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)



Abdul-Azziz, brother to the ruler of Sharjah, Trucial Oman States, 1963. (Andy Shepherd collection)



The fort at Mahadha, once occupied by the Omani Gendarmerie, seen in 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)

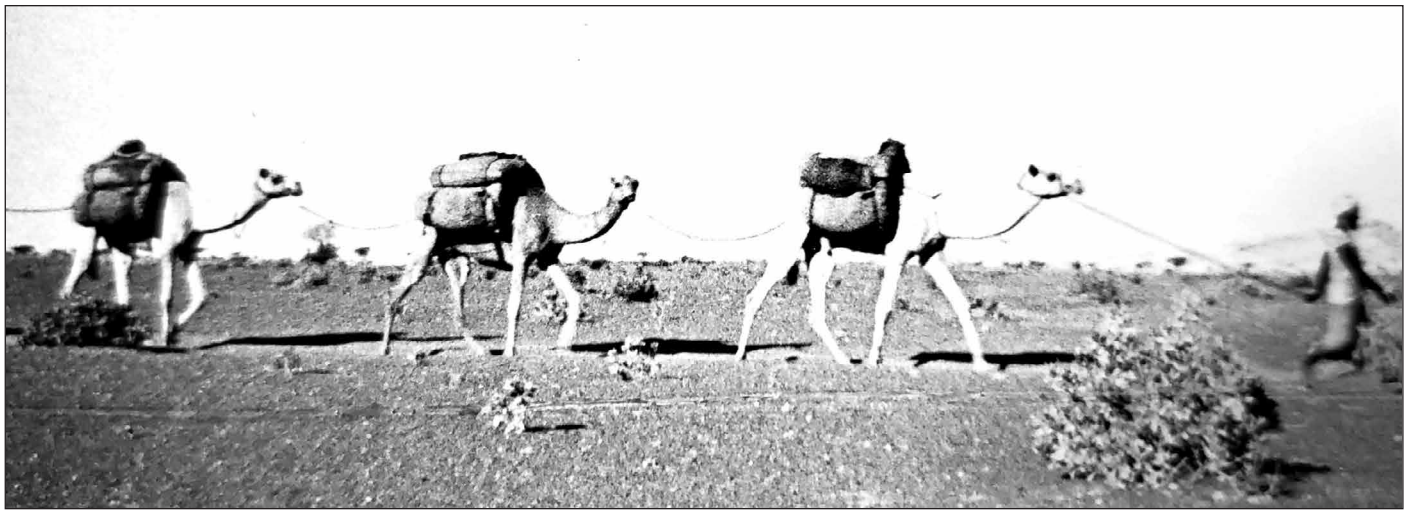
Driving in the dunes 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)

and healthcare improvements, in consolidating the military victories in the interior.

There were some obvious successes also, for example, an element of reconciliation was instigated by the de Ribbing Mission set up by the UN to look into the question of Oman. Many in the British establishment saw the mission as anti-British imperialism by those countries that used to be colonies of the Crown. However, there were positive outcomes for the Sultan, including the return of Buraimi refugees of Omani citizenship, which was considered and approved by the Sultan, allowing some who would have sided with the Imam to be brought into the influence of the Sultan.[43] There is also however an argument that the ability of the Sultan to act was prohibited by the British taking over key departments and elements of his government leading to his isolation in Salalah. The picture is quite complex therefore and is often charged with emotion and the politics of the post-colonial era.

The key change came to Oman by treaty of 1958, which allowed large-scale British support to defeat the insurgency in the north, but at the cost of making the Sultan very much dependant on British income. The Zanzibar subsidy, that had allowed some expenditure by the Sultan, had been paid by Britain since 1871 and was abruptly stopped in 1956. The Arabist view of this action and the subsequent 1958 agreement was not one of military failure by the Sultan, but of a deliberate plot by the British to gain influence over the Sultan. The precarious financial and strategic position Sultan Sa'id found himself in eventually resulted in a British delegation, under Julian Amery, arriving in Muscat in 1958, and a takeover of most of the key elements of government and the military.[44] This arguably led in turn to the permanent subjection of the Sultan to British interests. 'Despite a 25-year effort to secure his independence of British control and a decade after the withdrawal of the British Raj from Indian, Sa'id now found himself relegated to a similar status to that of the rulers of the old Indian 'native' states.'[45]

At this point the Sultan effectively went into exile in Salalah. The Sultan not leaving Salalah led to much instability within the country, it is likely that despite some of the development that did take place, if the coup of 1970 did not occur, another revolt would have.[46] The lack of control by the Sultan was seen within dispatches, such as the favouring of Sheikh Ahmad al Harthi causing the forbidding of the development secretary to build a road in Shaqia despite being approved by the Sultan.[47] These areas of disunity and division continued throughout the 1960s. The lack of direct rule undermined the Sultan's position both domestically and internationally; it failed in many ways to deal with the underlying causes of the conflict. However, what did occur was an isolation of those parties who were still supporting the Imam from



Still the primary method of carrying larger loads over extended distances as of 1964: another Omani camel train. (Andy Shepherd collection)

A view of the Empty Quarter in 1964. (Andy Shepherd collection)

the economic development in the interior. Squadron Leader John Horrell commanding the SOAF at the time commented:

> After the takeover of the Nizwa Imamate by the Sultan following the death of the old Imam, there was of course, great disagreement which led to the insurrection of Ghalib and Talib. When this had been dealt with successfully militarily there were questions raised in the UN about the Sultans right to rule the tribes of the Interior and indeed doubts over their loyalty.[48]

The loyalty question was much to the fore in mid-1962. Squadron Leader Horrall, Commander SOAF, remembered flying Hugh Oldman and Colin Maxwell up to Balah to talk to the leaders of the two paramount tribes in that area: the purpose of this visit was to ascertain the level of tribal support particularly with regard to security.[49]

> A little later (probably August 1964) Baron de Ribbing visited Oman with a remit from the UN to investigate the level of tribal support for the Sultan in Northern Oman particularly those areas formally controlled by The Imam of Nizwa. During this visit I flew de Ribbing down to Tawi Suleem in the Shaquia where there was a great gathering of the tribal leaders. Of course I was never privy to de Ribbing's findings following his Oman investigation but it seems to have come out in the Sultan's favour.[50]

In addition to the inability to conduct reconciliation to a significant extent internally, Sultan Sa'id also failed to engage the wider region in order to prevent the international sponsoring of the rebellion. It was commented upon by the Foreign Office in 1961 that external politics alone has kept the rebel cause alive.[51] These consisted of both talk at the UN-instigated by the Arab League, and also international terrorism in the Gulf. The statement by the Arab League to the UN argued that a refusal by the Imam to grant oil concessions to British companies in Oman led to an invasion of Oman by British-led forces in 1955. Although this statement may go against the strict international law view of Britain, where the Sultan's authority has been recognised in the interior, in a particular perspective, it is also true. This is shown by the motivations behind the invasion, up to and including Cabinet level in Britain, being for oil interests in Kuwait and then later Oman.[52]

The low-level terrorist acts continued throughout the early 1960s the most significant of which was the bombing of the British Steamer SS *Dara* killing 338 people in April 1962. Two members of the Omani Revolutionary Movement joined the boat in Bahrain and set off dynamite which sank the ship off Dubai. Further attacks took place with the SS *Waingapoe* bombed as it left Muscat for Salalah in March 1962, and the MV *Daressa* was bombed leaving Dubai later in the year. Such acts kept alive the insurgency in the international media, having strategic impact well beyond their impact on the ground. Much of this was used as ammunition for the political campaigning at the United Nations.

Dispatches noted variable relations with the Sultan and neighbouring rulers throughout the 1960s; in 1962 a report stated, 'Relations with the Ruler of Dubai seem to have improved. With

Abu Dhabi, there is coolth [sic].'[53] It was widely recognised that 'the threat remains of a further rebellion in Oman inspired and armed from outside by Saudi Arabia, supported by Iraq and the United Arab Republic and applauded by most Arab States'.[54] Despite this, the increased communist threats from both Yemen and Egypt meant that the support from the USA for insurgent actions against post-colonial Britain was in decline. Without this financial and material support, and fundamentally without the political protection of the USA, and therefore Saudi Arabia, there was no ability for resistance to continue.

The wheels of political change moved slowly to formalise what was inevitably going to be the international recognition of Oman as a unified state. The reconciliation with Saudi Arabia did not occur until 1971 when Sultan Qaboos met with King Faysal and agreed to meet with the Imam (who did not turn up). There was much behind the scenes dealing with Talib, who asked for a role of Minister of Defence, but was offered the role of Minister of Oil. Talib refused and died soon after in exile in Cairo. Ghalib met with the Sultan and refused to call him Sultan, calling him Shaykh, and Sulayman also refused to meet and reconcile.[55] That said, the large majority of the rebels in Saudi Arabia grasped the opportunity to go home and end the conflict, accepting that the cause of the Iman, without support of Saudi Arabia, was now lost. This visit by the Sultan led to the formal recognition of Oman by Saudi Arabia.

There were a number of reasons for the international opposition to the Sultan, but key to this was the underlying premise of the statements in the UN, which was the desire by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Russia to reduce British influence in a region where she had previously dominated. This premise was put forward to the Commander of British Forces in the Middle East who stated that:

> ... the Saudis obviously aimed to dominate the whole of the Arabian Peninsula and to weaken British influence there, so destroy the faith of other Arab rulers in our willingness and ability to go to their assistance at their request. You will see that at this stage in the game the Russian and Egyptian interests coincide with those of Saudi Arabia.[56]

This understanding of the wider geopolitical consensus led to the British considering other options, including shared sovereignty of Buraimi to bring about a peaceful resolution.[57] However, despite these considerations, the British policy towards Oman was dominated by a desire to maintain the oil routes to Kuwait, and therefore international bodies to a certain extent were ignored by the British and therefore by default the Sultan. The lack of international engagement led to further support for the Imam, and in turn, a lengthening of the conflict, albeit at a reduced intensity.

It can be argued that the developmental policies of Sultan Sa'id were tempered more by financial availability and economic limitations before oil, than a desire to suppress his people. 'The difference between Sa'id and Qaboos was not that one used brute force while the other sought reconciliation; the current Sultan was simply more discriminating in applying and tempering coercive measures that his father had been.'[58]

There is, however, some evidence to the contrary. In the Dhufar conflict 'even after the oil shock of 1973 led to a massive increase in oil revenues the Foreign Office officials remained concerned that the lack of progress in civil development could undermine the Sultan's cause'.[59]

Despite the widespread negative view of the lack of development in Northern Oman in the decade following the 1969 intervention, it has been shown that there were significant improvements in many areas. These improvements combined with robust action towards his enemies and a stronger policing and intelligence force, led to a reduction in the intensity of the conflict. 'Although they [the rebels] continued for the next two or three years to smuggle arms and mines to their supporters scattered throughout central Oman, the heart had gone out of the insurgency with the storming of Jabal Akhdar.'[60]

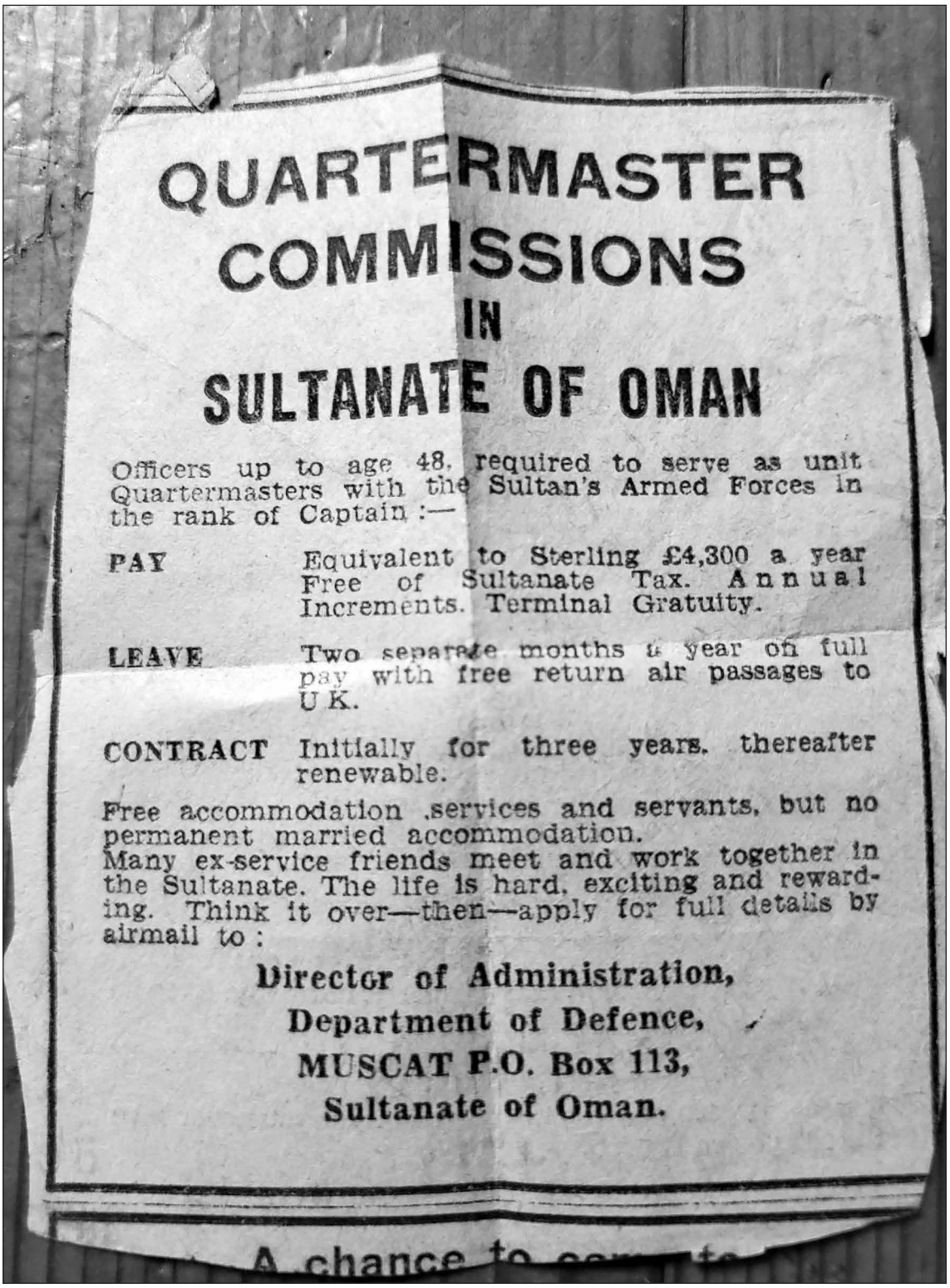
Moreover, the population had lost heart in its support to the Imam, as the improvements to healthcare and the economy were starting to show. The expansion of the army, being the biggest employer in Oman at this point, and in employment within infrastructure projects, was leading to a long-term loyalty in Northern Oman to the Sultan. This reconciliation and development, although not on the same scale as that in the subsequent Dhufar conflict, was as significant and led to long-term peace and stability by cementing a long-lasting loyalty between the Sultan and his people.

The causes of conflict in Northern Oman can be summarised as a divide between the interior and the coast, exacerbated by a perceived involvement of foreign powers, mainly Britain, interfering with the Ibadi culture. The short-term undermining of the Sultan's ability to deal with the rebels, through political interference and a control of foreign policy by the British, led to further rebellions. The Sultan himself increased the divisions between the interior and the coast, by failing, before the conflict in Northern Oman, to provide a modern development programme for his people, despite a regional increase in standards of living. Some argue that the failure of development led to future conflicts in Dhufar, and while Sa'id was certainly culpable for the growth on instability in Oman, this was also a missed opportunity for British capacity building in the wider sense.[61] However, despite these issues across the whole country, there is considerable evidence to show that some civil and military development programmes in Northern Oman were successful and were the key factors in producing long-term stability in Northern Oman. 'The British Army's organisational culture leads one to predict that it will employ minimal force to support civilian statesmen winning over potential hostile populations through hearts and minds campaigns and defeat insurgents with special forces.'[62]

This perception was not correct in Northern Oman, where conventional forces fought the conflict, and even the Special Forces were used in a conventional role, not for surgical action. The large RAF bombing campaign on Jebel Akhdar can be compared in intensity to the other operations in Northern Oman during the conflict, the effects of which are outlined in the patrol reports of the SAS. These reports constantly refer to the destruction of villages; 'Sharjah, very badly damaged by bombing. All houses affected. Uninhabited; Agir, irrigation system damaged and not working.'[63]

This conventional campaign did not deal with the underlying causes of the conflict but did create the conditions to which the future development of the SAF and civil development programmes could take place. It was these development programmes, after the major combat operations, rather than during, which impacted on the underlying causes of the conflict.

The development focus of both military and civil development in Oman worked within the modern doctrine of focusing on 'stability multipliers',[64] providing the key amenities such as


QUARTERMASTER
COMMISSIONS
IN
SULTANATE OF OMAN
Officers up to age 48, required to serve as unit Quartermasters with the Sultan's Armed Forces in the rank of Captain :—
PAY
Equivalent to Sterling £4,300 a year Free of Sultanate Tax. Annual Increments. Terminal Gratuity.
LEAVE
Two separate months a year on full pay with free return air passages to U.K.
CONTRACT
Initially for three years, thereafter renewable.
Free accommodation, services and servants, but no permanent married accommodation.
Many ex-service friends meet and work together in the Sultanate. The life is hard, exciting and rewarding. Think it over—then—apply for full details by airmail to :
Director of Administration,
Department of Defence,
MUSCAT P.O. Box 113,
Sultanate of Oman.
Join The Sultan's Armed Forces Today! Announcement in the British newspapers of the late 1950s. (Michael Clinch collection)

electricity, water and roads as well as assistance aimed at improving the standards and competency of the civil government, the police and the military.[65] Modern views of doctrine in capacity building and counter insurgency state that aid should be limited in its simplest form as it does not enable long-term economic growth or deal with the underlying issues of instability as 'outsiders can never achieve what locals themselves are not willing to follow through on'.[66] The success of development in Northern Oman was that the Sultan had buy-in from his people for these development programmes, as the military development created jobs, where none had existed and brought an element of loyalty to the nation, rather than tribes. The civil development programmes, although relatively limited in scope, again gave loyalty to the Sultan, as they brought in healthcare, job and education initiatives, where none had existed before. The Sultan's development plan being limited also restricted any perceived Westernisation of the interior, preventing future fractions between the multicultural coast and conservative interior.

The reconciliation between the tribes of the interior and the Sultan was punitive in nature, in that they were forced to side with the Sultan or would be punished. The complexities of the ethnic breakdown of Northern Oman make the understanding

of reconciliation difficult, however, these influences are still represented today where some 'groups are often small in total size [but] represented in such areas as politics and commerce in numbers disproportionate to the weight of their communities.'[67] This transformation of the interior into the Sultan's image was more of an assimilation of the tribal system of the interior through coercion and force than true reconciliation. However, the lack of subsequent conflict in the north shows this was successful. Sultan Sa'id's approach to reconciliation was not dissimilar to the approach of Sultan Qaboos, integrating a society that was loyal to him, as he provided economic prosperity. Sultan Qaboos' greatest success was to allow Omani nationalism to find a place, if not above, then within the tribal structure.[68] The process started by Sultan Sa'id was a move from suppressed tribal poverty to a wealthier nationalism.

The British Army has often used a distorted concept of its past conduct to guide contemporary operations.[69] Counter insurgency narratives are dominated by an assumption that 'Minimum force' is applied; this narrative outlines a policy of 'population-centric rather than an enemy-centric doctrine, attacking the adversary's strategy rather than seeking the physical elimination of the insurgency'.[70] This doctrine was not followed in the conflict in Northern Oman, with conventional military action used to its fullest extent to achieve conditions where subsequent development could take place. Contemporary authors have argued that the Dhofar conflict was won because of an increase in funds available with the 1975 oil crisis and the involvement of large-scale forces from the Iranians.[71] Comparisons to the conflict in Northern Oman can be made in regard to this, however, although the conventional military measures defeated the rebels in 1955, 1957 and then comprehensively in 1959, the rebellion continued. It was the development, both military and civilian, financed in this case by Britain, which made the greatest impact on the underlying causes of the conflict. Some argue that Sa'id's success in 1958-59 had been a pyrrhic victory due to the latter conflict in the South,[72] however victory did lead to lasting peace and stability in Northern Oman. Therefore, although the conflict did not follow counter insurgency doctrine, it did bring victory. What has been shown is that in the case of Northern Oman, long-term peace and security was secured by a conventional military campaign, followed by a subsequent civilian development programme. This peace, despite the separate conflict that occurred in the south of the country, has continued to this day, and in relation to its neighbouring countries is certainly an exception.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Walsall in the West Midlands, educated at the University of Manchester and Kings College London, Peter Shergold is a former Infantry Officer who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. During his service he was seconded as a Loan Service Officer to the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces for two years, and therefore has a detailed insight into the country's history and armed forces. This is his first instalment for Helion's @War series.